







The Story of Argus

According to Greek mythology, Argus was a giant with one hundred eyes. While some of his eyes "slept," he kept watch with the others. Hermes lulled Argus to sleep with his magic lyre and then slew him with a stone. Upon finding the Dead Argus, Hera, queen of the Gods, placed his eyes in the tail of the peacock. The cover of Argus traditionally represents the ancient legend handed down to us by the Greeks. The title was chosen to represent the different views and opinions of readers as though each perspective were an eye of the peacock.



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Spring '98 Contest Winners

Cover Winner

Traci Moss

Poetry

- 1st Justine Courtney Reilly
On Reading Bleak House
- 2nd Clark Remedies
la Brea nth
- 3rd Medusa
Pizza Slut

Fiction

- 1st K
Waiting for M
- 2nd Robin Higginbotham
Poisonous Deception
- 3rd Town Mixx
Pieces of Blue Nights

Non-fiction

- 1st Sleeping Dragons
The Problem of Expressionism is Taoism
- 2nd Jack Day
The Tragedy of Life
- 3rd Matthew Barton
Apple Creek's Royce Complex
- 

Fall '98 Contest Winners

Art

- 1st Antwinette Cofield
Landscape
- 2nd Amy Haney
Miss M
- 3rd Antwinette Cofield
Silhouette

Poetry

- 1st Kelly Kathleen Day
After the Stroke
- 2nd Reven Enola
Untitled
- 3rd Christal Traylor
To Die There

Fiction

- 1st Lynnette Jackets
Dreams of the Dead
- 2nd Lynnette Jackets
Elizabeth's Oak
- 3rd Sleeping Dragon
Ockham's Razor

Non-Fiction

- 1st Jack Day
Forcing the Issue
- 2nd Sandy Baber
The Color of Language
- 3rd Beckie Farabough
You Must Give to Recieve
- 

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Traci Moss

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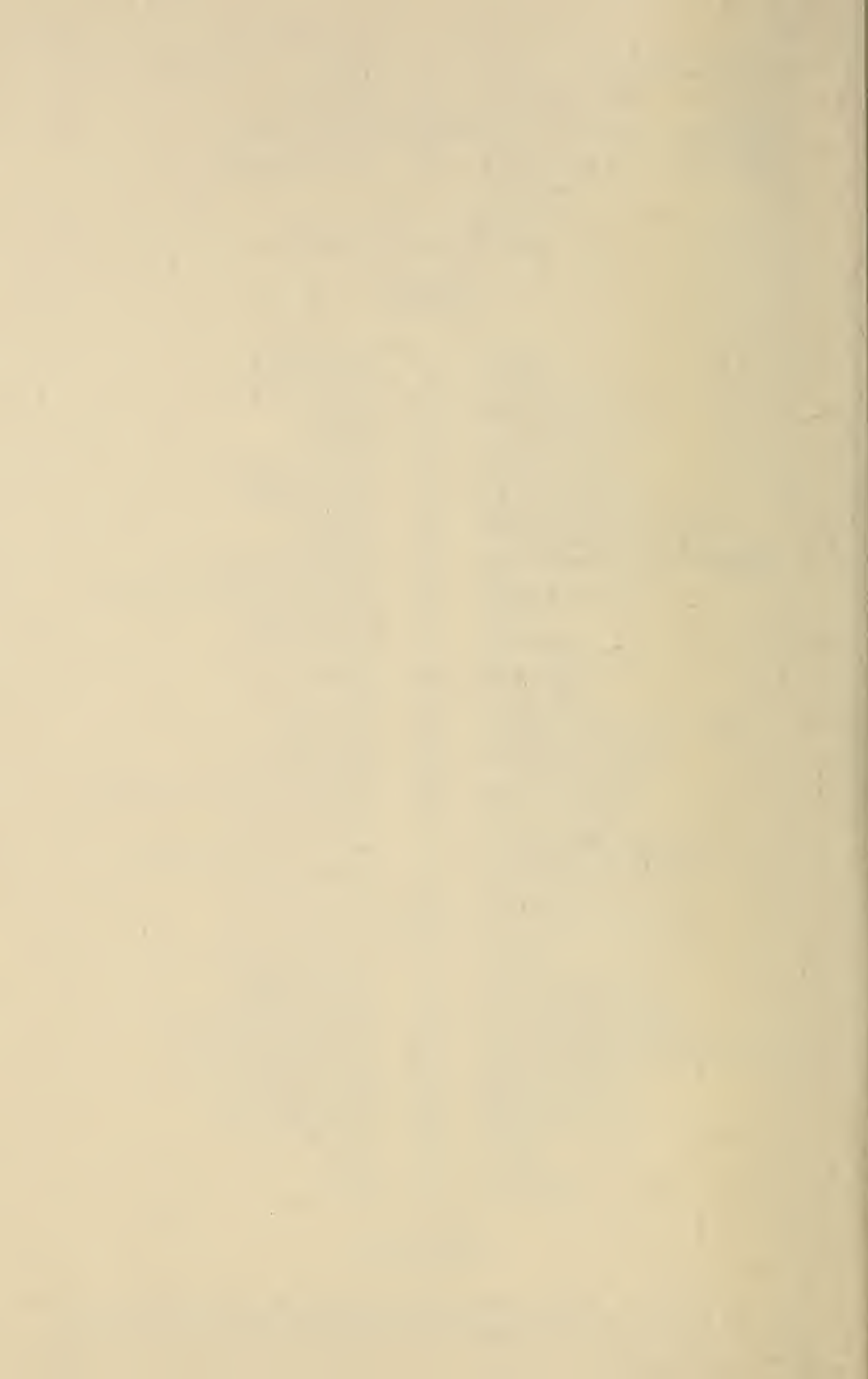
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like a seed that has lost its embryonic coat,
i find my inner child hidden in the depths of my mind
her frail hands and sad eyes
hidden beneath her hair
proves her vulnerability.
each tear she sheds is a fragment of hopes and dreams
that she had persevered for.
the weak heart of this child has stirred up a flame of passion
engulfing the artist's touch,
and with each note that plays in her mind,
the mending begins.
there she sits,
devoted to the path of self-discovery,
hidden beneath the shadows of society with her eyes toward
conformities.
determination pierces her hallowed soul
and grasps a unity with nature,
the beautiful harmony of the world.
absorbing this harmony,
she releases the enchanting melodies of herself through her
fingertips.

Reven Enola



Tree of Woe
William F. Meslow

To Die There

If you let them

*People will put you where you don't really belong
In a place where darkness always prevails
Heartache is rampant, and sadness incessant
To lie there, to cry there, to die there--forever.*

If you are not careful

*Your comfort will come from the depths of hell
Fresh flowing blood will be your warm blanket
Screams of terror your lullaby
And pits of darkness your bed
To lie there, to cry there, to die there--forever.*

Don't be too satisfied with what you have

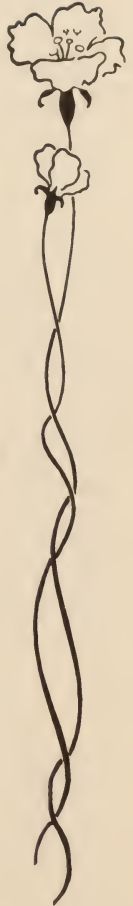
*Your house can turn into a place of captivity
Your lover, a mirror of hatred and mistrust
Your day, a pool of sorrow for you
To lie there, to cry there, to die there--forever.*

Sooner or later

*You will feel the spread of emptiness inside
Feel the conception of misery within your womb
Your eyes will find rest on that thing called nothing
To lie there, to cry there, to die there--forever.*

To lie there

*With your ignorant self
Lying in wait for the darkness to come
Doing nothing to change its course*



Christal Traylor

Sometimes I tell her that her nose looks like a kitty-cat's. She tells me I'm silly. But there's a lot about her that's like a cat. She loves to sleep and she loves to eat and she absolutely loves to be petted no matter what she tells you. She has long black hair that you'd rub all over your face and play peek-a-boo with and sometimes when we make love on the futon or on the floor or in the cramped backseat of the car, I could swear she purrs. She doesn't think she's a cat, but wouldn't a cat say that just to be ornery?

There are times when I contemplate her body for no good reason at all. I'm not horny, or moony-eyed like some love struck buck; I just think about her like she's a part of me, like I'm looking at my hand and wondering why it is like it is. I think about her nipple, the inverted right one that I can't help but josh her about. It hurts her feelings when I do, but I can't help myself. I tell her that I like it, and I do, but she doesn't believe me. You wouldn't think that you could have something so lopsided as one innie and one outie and still be a stripper, but you'd only think that if you'd never been in a real strip bar and had only seen them in the movies or on cable where the strippers are really models and actresses. In the real world, strippers are as genuine and flawed as house trailers and homemade clothes.

Don't get me wrong though, everybody knows she's beautiful. She doesn't think so 'cause she doesn't make a lot of money stripping, but that's just because she doesn't do any of the funny stuff, giving middle aged, scared guys in khaki slacks hand-jobs under the table for extra money. People have gone as far as calling me naïve to my face for thinking that, but I know better. She's a good girl. I know it when she sits in my lap and I hold her, one arm under her back, the other under her knees and I make her nuzzle my neck. She'd die if anybody knew that.

Tonight I'm contemplating her body, not for no good reason, but because I'm worried in the worst kind of way. It's four in the morning and she hasn't come home. The club closes at

two and she's usually cleaned off the paint by two and a half and in her car. It should've taken her about a half-an-hour to get home. She's never this late, so all of a sudden I'm thinking maybe she ain't as spotless as I thought. I think about all the times I've hit the road to get away from her for awhile, when I went to Old Mexico to the volcano or when I drove out to New Mexico with my buddies to see where they used to test the bomb, all the time saying it was to do research for some story, but really it was because I had to just not be around her for a bit.

Then my thinking turns even darker and I'm imagining some pervert followed her into the parking lot and violated her, bruising her on the inside and on the outside with his thing and that she is dead. Or maybe she is alive in some hospital and that when I finally go to her I won't have the right things to say and that she would see how weak I was for not being able to put things right. She'll be thinking so hard it'll shake the hospital. She'll be thinking so loud I'll hear it, "Where's your words? You love words, but where have they gone and left you now?"

And then she came home and she ain't raped and she ain't hurt where I can see, but I'm not relieved. I'm yelling "Where were you?" and she's telling me that she fell asleep at the wheel and wrecked her car and that she was too afraid to call me 'cause I'd get mad, so she'd just hitchhiked. And then I'm yelling louder about how stupid it was to fall asleep at the wheel and how stupid it was to hitch. I'm thinking about how I should be relieved that she's alive but that I'm not. Instead, I'm mad because I see all our plans going up in air like balls but not coming down. I'm thinking how we're not going to be able to buy a piece of land like we'd planned, like I'd planned, because we're going to have to buy her a new old car. And then all of a sudden I'm remembering how she'd been complaining about having trouble staying up on the ride home and I'm remembering why she has to drive so far in the first place. We tell people we live where we do because the rent's cheaper out of town, but it's really cause it's closer to my work. I'm not mad at her anymore and I don't want to be mad at her 'cause I'm all tired out from being scared.

Then I'm kissing her hard and sloppy even though she is crying. I'm trying not to cry myself and I'm pulling up her shirt over her head. Then I'm kissing her nipple, the innie, like I'm apologizing to it. We wind up having some of the best sex ever, which isn't a surprise, 'cause it always seems like sex gets better the worse the circumstances preceding it. I don't even have to eat her out to make her cum this time and when she does throw one off, she shudders and cries like a baby.

Now we're lying together like a couple of spoons, her front to my back. I manage to fish out a cigarette from my pants pocket without waking her, even though I have to stretch to reach them. I think how I should quit, which just makes that cigarette taste all the better, 'cause it could be my last. Out of nowhere, I'm think that maybe she's not a kitty-cat like I thought. Maybe she is a cat but she ain't been domesticated like maybe I want, but how she's good in her accidental way. Maybe I'm a little boy chasing her through the palmettos, not 'cause I want to hurt her, but 'cause I'm little and I want to pet anything fuzzy and pretty. But she runs away "cause she knows I'm gonna hurt her whether I want to or not, squeeze her too hard or something. Except in real life, I do know I'm gonna hurt her and she doesn't seem to, or she does and can't help herself enough to, run away. It's just easier for me to think that she's the runaway and not me.



Miss M
Amy Haney

Little Amsterdam

I walk the knobby streets

sweater hanging to my knees

hair hanging to my elbows

and i walk

glasses

long socks and gloves

shrinking within my

disguise

my escape complete

along with my

loneliness.

Medusa

a child's city...

Pink and yellow buttercups scattered among patches of green
and white clover

jungle gyms and swing sets

great fortresses of steel as high as the eye can see

but, there are no trees

where are all the trees?

a chain fence chases the cars away

it traps me in

i see the bright blue sky speckled with black dots of birds

i want to go with them

where do they live?

i would climb to their heights

if only i could reach

such a world of colors and sights

but no trees

Earthfyre



Litmus

The faeries have
fled your garden.
Into their vacancy
slink and skulk
the eaters of the dead,
their vampiric grey
sucking, draining
the colors of you.
Your willows no
longer weep; your
roses shun the vase;
your Susans have
closed their eyes,
lids clenched against
the blight of your void.
Baskets hang limply,
cracked and barren,
from the boughs of trees
wild with inattention.
The weeds have begun
to reclaim their plots;
the nettle, the burr,
the rye have all
breached your Babylon.



Beneath the crumbling
brick borders writhe
catacombs and labyrinths
of silverfish and centipedes,
thriving in the shadow
of your absence.

Yet, the hydrangea
persists, almost unnoticed,
thrust modestly
from the ground.
Its chameleon blossoms
shift and shimmer,
blue and pink
vacillations of you.
Waxy memorials of
a time, your fingers
within the earth;
a time, I could
behold you.

Michael Arnaud

Pretty Little Fish

I sit here alone in this room
With a chair and a desk
God of this world that is
And I watch
The little fish
So content in their bowl
But not quite
Searching for something they swim all day
And when they don't find it
They look somewhere else
As one manages to leap from
The bowl
He comes to realize what is beyond
And when I put him back
He swims away
Only to find him dead outside
The bowl
The next day

Stephen Eddy

Pieces of Blue Nights

Marjorie Gawain

I know what I am to you and I know much more than that. I know because I read a lot into your books and into your people. I know that if you saw me I would just be another nigger with a guitar to you. And I know that if you just saw my words, as you are now but without my telling you the color of my skin, on a white page, always white, that you would take my words as if they were handed to you from on high. The people that come into the bar I can read real good 'cause I'm not always trying to roll back my eyes and look at myself like other folks is. That's what a prophet is, somebody who can read words that nobody else even sees. But if I was to tell what I saw, they wouldn't think I was a prophet, they'd think I was a nut. They'd say I was crazy for seeing what wasn't there. I say they is crazy for not seeing what's right in front of their faces.

Sometimes I read them books about olden times. The Battle of the Bulge and Emancipation Proclamation, that's history. King Arthur, and Hercules and Doc Savage, that's history too. My mama always told me, "Ain't nothing in them books for niggers," and I would keep on reading until she'd grab it up out of my hand and yell, "show me the niggers in dat!" while she stabbed the pages with her finger. But I read just the same. I can tell you, you got to accept that the knights and such of them stories existed in some kind of way, maybe not like we heard about them, but somehow. Take another leap and say that they been living their lives over and over again, soul moving on from body to body. But you need to know that this reincarnating ain't like some believe, a process of building up to something, but of using up the natural energy God gives you. If you flare up like a nova in one life, you have that much less fuel in the next. A Jesus or Merlin would hardly have anything left at all after that first flare-up, but would still be going on life after life. And Arthur would have to stare down Modred, or whoever but he might be

facing him over the counter of the Circle K, fighting with him about the price of jerky. A grail quest becomes a trip to the park to pick up a dime bag without getting busted by the cops and such.

One of the stories of them decline days may have happened yesterday, might happen next week or never at all. In those days, before he woke up and saw what it was all about and it nearly killed him, Neal McGowen was just another boy at LSU spending his days drinking instead of studying, weak philosophizing rather than real thinking. He spent his nights with strangers at Tabby's bar off Government Street in Baton Rouge. The night I remember seeing him on was not a regular spring Saturday, though it was as wet as every spring Neal would have seen growing up in south Louisiana; it was cold. The cold weather had a crazy affect on the air, like it had crystallized the water into little mirrors that reflected what light was out there. Any more sharpness in that shadow blue night sky, though people sometimes thinks it's black, and you could almost see the brushstrokes that made it. The air reminded Neal of what he figured Scotland or Wales must be like. But the air had a second kind of cold, the kind that came from inside, out of Neal's fear at maybe seeing his life like it really was.

It was Saturday at Tabby's and that meant the house band, so Neal tucked his worries away with his shirttail for another time. He knew that if all followed its usual run, that the band would perform until they couldn't stand. That never happened until well after 2:00 a.m., and usually closer to 4:00. It was illegal to have the doors open past two, but Tabby's was a real Red Stick institution, so the police turned a blind eye.

Tabby Arthur, the guitarist, played at being a real blues man, like Willie Dixon or Muddy Waters and every other nigger musician that ever got the soul whammy put on them and pronounced "guitar" like "get-tar." Tabby and me like hooch better than drugs and gin better than just about anything. I ain't gonna lie, I can really put it away. The only thing I like better is playing bass for the band, not just cause I like to make it peel, but so I can watch people while I play and see through them without

them ever knowing. The bass ain't like the regular guitar where you got to be a big show off and burn up the stage. If you ever asked anybody in the know, they'd say, "Fox L. (that's me), he never shows at any kind of weakness, especially about feelings." Them rumors fly around about me like bugs around a porch-light. Everybody wants to know why I'm so hard, harder than life it seems sometimes to them. The smart ones liked to say I'd been run through the head with a railroad spike like Phineas Gage or some hit. The hearts liked to think it had to do with a woman, that I'd been like anybody else before. They told it like it was some kind of country western song, said she took off with my best friend, and I did my duty and followed them to the Texarkana border. They were shackled up in the Amino Real, a real shithole. They were dumb enough to be signed up under there own names. I put a whooping on the manager when he tried to stop me from going out to the room, but instead of just kicking in the particleboard door when I got there, I just put my ear to it to listen in. I could hear them fucking through the flimsy walls of the motel. It wasn't just the usual silly sounds of sex, you know, the armpit fart sounds of skin slapping together. It was real from the gut moaning from two people really into each other. I just fell apart, so much I couldn't even kill them. I never forgave myself or my heart and hate for letting me down. That's their story, not mine. How people react to the story, whether they believed it or not, said more about them than me. Most people fell into one of two camps: those who believed the story figured that some one happening could make a man one way or another and those that thought it was a bullshit story thought that 'cause they felt like what a man was was bred in the bones and was bound to come out.

The third member of the band back then was "Fatty" Ginser, the hippie burnout on drums. He was a totally different kind of animal than me or Tabby. He wasn't a drinker for sure, but he would light up and smoke his Indian Hay right there on stage. Most of the bar's regulars reckoned that Ginser got his nickname from those thick party joints that he smoked, but some of the girls knew better. Ginser had a Jimmy that was as big around as a

canon. He'd show it to anybody that would let him and put it in any hole that didn't bite. It was a good thing he never had any sisters 'cause he'd have been put in jail.

Part of the fun of watching the band for people was trying to guess who would fall out first. Since they figured I was like a robot and couldn't get fucked up, it was always between Tabby and Ginser to see who would fall out first. Sometimes people would even bet on it as if it was a dog race. The secret contest was one of the draws that kept people coming back. Ginser was good, and joints couldn't put you down as quick as a bottle, but Tabby could really put it away. Before that last drink that would put him over the edge Tabby always seemed, to the half-hypnotized, half-lit crowd, to draw his strength up out of the gin, each swallow making him a year younger. At times he could have been a boy king before the faithful. Then he'd have one too many and forget the words to a song and they'd see an old man whose years hung on his bones like rags, covering up what he'd been and would never be again. Tabby didn't have no real magic mason jar full of gin or something to rip off the rags.

But Neal couldn't see all them goings on in Tabby's. To him it was just a bar. Tabby's had no parking lot, so when Neal and his buddies got there, they had to make their way from the grammar school lot across the street. Right before the sill of the door was a deep pothole full of stagnant rainwater. It was big enough to act like a moat if somebody decided to draw up the piece of plywood that bridged it.

Neal walked in and there she was, looking better to him than was fair or nice. He knew her name, Gwenneth Morgan, but that was about it. They'd a night class together for about three weeks and Neal had figured he'd have a whole semester to warm up to her and ask her out, but he only got as far as saying, "boring, huh?" before she dropped the class. She'd only nodded her head when he said it. At first he wasn't sure it was the same girl, since he had real trouble recognizing people outside of however he was used to seeing them. She had just enough of the starved artist bred into her, like her daddy was an art teacher, her mama a dancer or something, to make her look snide. Maybe she

was picking the world apart with her eyes to rebuild it into some painting or such, or maybe she was just sizing it up for a fight. To Neal, her fierceness tagged her as hot, way fuckable, and worship-worthy. She was bone-lean, with the kind of skinny ass that only the whitest boys like. Neal figured that if a person thought they were the end-all be-all, that it just about doubled the chances of it being true.

If they'd been meeting up for a gunfight, her gang would have had Neal's outgunned strictly on account of looks. Gwen was there with a graze herd of sandal wearing, coffee slurpers, who could whine about how the world was big pile of pain at the same time they was paying for dinner with daddy's credit card, but you had to admit they was pretty to look at, boys included. Neal had the boys. There's a certain brand of pretty girls who like to cover themselves with uglier girls to make themselves look even choicer. That wouldn't work so well with guys. If you show up to the feeder with a bunch of bone dicks in Star Trek T-shirts three sizes too small and they're all the time acting half-gay then you can count on going home empty handed. Neal's crew weren't nose-pickers or anything, they was just average guys trapped in squishy white bodies.

The only one of the three guys that Neal could even say he knew was James DeLancel, a middle-aged half Greek, half honkaloid with a potbelly and the worst fucking terminal case of sunshine up the ass you ever saw. Neal occasionally did some little carpenter work for him. If a little knowledge is dangerous, Neal was lethal. James thought he knew a lot, which compared to James he did. So every so often he'd call Neal up to build a deck on his house or some shit and the two of them would spend six times as much time and energy as a single, decent carpenter would to do the same job better.

James must not have been real popular in school 'cause he liked to keep around college boys like Neal thinking that young and horny might rub off on him. James had called up Neal to hit the strip clubs with him. Neal was half convinced that James was some kind of faggot into young guys, but he ran a video store and Neal knew he'd better get in the market for a job if was gonna pay

off them college loans. James always paid, but it was up to Neal to scrape up some other folks. The best he could do was a guy from the dorm, AR, and a grad student named Orlando, or "Lando." They'd all gotten good and lathered up at the Gold Club and decided to leave before they got permanent woodies and Tabby's seemed as good a place as any to wind down.

AR was an Indian kid and sort of had a special status 'cause he was the only one of them with enough money to ever quit whatever job he was at without starving to death if he ever got pissed off enough to pull a Johnny Paycheck. Boys respect a guy who can flip the bird at the world. AR didn't fit the role of the rebel though. It was hard to think of somebody as too dangerous who had never eaten fast food, who had never spoken into a clown's nose and said I'll take a double squirrely burger with cheese. Processed cheese had a way of toughening you up.

Lando was only a little older than Neal, twenties somewhere, but he was already married. He came off as a little less creepy than James and AR, the kind of guy who might actually have lost his virginity, even if he wasn't married. Lando's wife beeped him every seventeen minutes like faithful, and from what Neal could tell, she had him pretty well licked. Lando 911 punched into the pre-dial on his cellphone just in case something happened.

Neal and the boys walked in and found the usual crowd giving off the usual vibes. Tabby's has always been about as close to perfection as you'll ever find. They out to run the UN like this bar. There's the turtleneck set, all the college kids looking to be Dylan Thomas or Bill Burroughs, and then there's the poor government street locals just trying to kill an evening. The two groups flow into each other 'cause there ain't no tables at Tabby's in the plural sense, the building's too narrow. There is "table" or there is outside. "Table" is really four long tables set end to end. The setup always makes me think of one of those party halls in Viking movies. When you come in, you just grab the first spot you see and talk to whoever's near you whether you come in with a bunch of people or not.

If you'd been in enough to be a regular you'd know that

you had to buy a round for the people to either side of you and the guy directly across from you. There wasn't no menu to speak of at Tabby's. There was something in a plastic cup called "BEER" and there was Tom's brand chips. As far as Neal knew, if you needed something more then it was BYO, which lots of people did. Neal just wasn't in enough to get anything else. The specialty of the house was "Gross Neglect," and only Tabby knew what was in it. It was blue and tasted like it came out of God's still and was served in mugs so nobody that wasn't all the way in the know could see what was in your glass. If you got one, you were honored enough to drink it even if you didn't like it.

Neal and crew were taking their seats in the middle of the band's second set. Neal wasn't exactly thrilled that they'd been able to find four empty seats in a row. A sweet, homely-looking college girl named Amy came to take their orders. Amy wanted to be beautiful, but she got stuck with a good heart and nobody to share it with. She walked up without a word and took out a pad and pen from her beer sopped half apron. James and Neal knew you only got served the first round, to give you a chance to tip the help. You had to go to the bar for refills. It was all part of the ritual.

"Beer" Neal said. "Beer" James echoed. AR looked very thoughtful as he said, "I think I'll have one also." Earl shook his head in the negative and said, "I'll just have water." The waitress's silence didn't mean she was going to bring it to him. If Lando wanted water in Tabby's he'd have to drink it out of the toilet or get a divining rod.

Neal faded in and out of conversation like he was picking up a ball game from Venus in his head. He tuned back in just in time to catch James at the tail-end of saying something. "Not that it really matters either way, but I don't think he's gay. Maybe he's just really effeminate."

Catching on to who he was talking about, Neal answered, "I don't know. I've never seen him show interest in a woman, but he may just be asexual, you know." Neal added as he started to rise from his seat, "But he's the only guy I've ever seen dot his little "i"s with hearts."

Neal had guzzled down his first beer quick so he could run into Gwen on his way for a refill. She was abusing cigarette and waiting on a beer. He took it as a good sign that she was getting her own drinks 'cause it meant that either she wasn't there with any guy in particular, or she was being neglected by somebody. She turned her head to him as he pulled up to the bar so he gave her a nod back. She responded by turning the back of her head to him and taking a drag. After the bargirl brought her a beer, Gwen walked away like he was invisible.

Gwen's brush off only made Neal want her more and he was fantasizing about her and a bottle of Bosco when he went back to the table. James was talking about his freak-fuck roommate. "So I'm sitting there on my toilet," James says, "and I see this lump of mushy brown something there in the corner where the tub meets the wall and I'm thinking 'what's that gross bastard done now?'" His face squinted up and he reached out with his left hand as he narrated the next part. "I'm grossed out but I have to know, so I take a piece of toilet paper and reach for it. I scoop it up and, well, uh, I sniffed it." Everybody looked grossed out. "But it was just a piece of chocolate," he finished as his shoulders slumped reliving that first relief. Neal wasn't about to go through an evening of that kind of talk without putting on a hard buzz and in two hours he was lit up.

The whole time he was filling his tank he wasn't listening, he was watching; watching Gwenneth and her outlaw bunch. They might have been prettier but they sure wasn't any less weird, all stuck up and super aware of themselves. He couldn't be sure, but he had suspicions about which of the boys belonged to her. The fellow was seated directly to the right of her, but it was more than his closeness that gave it away, it was a familiar look he gave when he looked her over. It was a look that said he didn't need to look to close at her, he'd mapped her all out. Neal was fiercely jealous at the thought of the other fellow making his business on top of Gwen. It was blasphemy by Neal's reckoning to look on her like she was just some piece of ass; she was the queen of all pussy.

Neal would have hated Gwen's boy purely out of

principle. Even with the cold air, the boyfriend wore khaki shorts and sandals, only giving in to the atmosphere by wearing a loose green v-necked sweater like one of them male models or some queer. Neal took real issue with the sweater, as a symbol, not just some clothes. Neal made up a whole life story for the boy with just the sweater as a clue. Neal decided he was the first generation of his family, the "Greens," born into decent comfort. His father was smart, but pimple scarred and pale and was always hung up about whether his pecker was big enough. His mother was the first pretty girl to show interest in his father-to-be, which just happened to be after Paw Green's brains, hard work and no social life paid off in light fixtures or some shit. Young Greenie was lucky enough to get his mother's looks and enough of daddy's brain. His oldest sister was a lot older, maybe 30 years old, and had been an accident. His older brother got mom's sense, dad's lumpy body and his very own drug problem and was generally reckoned as the family cross to bear.

Neal was reading the Green family bible out of his own head until suddenly, the way you can hear someone call your name in a crowded room he saw an opportunity. Greenie said something to Gwen that he must have thought was pretty smart, 'cause he put on a shit-eating grin afterwards. Gwen shot him ray beams from her eyes but he never saw 'cause he'd turned back to the rest of their group laughing and talking without losing a beat. Neal figured Gwen wasn't exactly accustomed to people treating her as light as she treated them. He knew he'd figured right whenever he saw her shoot Greenie that hard turn your heart to stone look.

Gwen was having a shitty time, which she'd decided was totally Scott's (that was Green's real name) fault. He was showing off, which she might have liked if it hadn't been at her expense. "He's fucking one of these bitches," she thought as she looked around the table, "or he wants to." She would have been right if she'd thought it was both. That part of her that was psychic knew what she was going to do to pay him back even before her waking self realized it. She knew was going home with Neal, though she didn't know him by name yet. He'd do just as

good as anybody and since he'd been eyeing her all night, she knew it would be less work.

Once she had her plan in hand, Gwen let her mind wander to other things, especially the mule's rump that seemed to be parked on her bladder. She realized how it was all part of the way things had to happen. He'd get up shortly after she did and "accidentally" run into her as she came out of the can. He'd do it just for the chance to be seen by her but it would pay off for him way big. Men were so predictable that what they did barely registered as a happening with Gwen most of the time. She didn't quite meet his eyes when she slipped him a smile across the room as she got up.

To understand what happened between the time Gwen went into the bathroom and when she came out, you got to know something about the forces making her tick. By her own figuring, if she didn't count being easy, Gwen had two major vices. One was the common vice of stealing, not out of necessity but out of the need to get off on doing something bad but not awful. She'd managed to control that vice by avoiding temptation. Her other appetite, a funky sex fetish for public johns had always been more trouble. Lots of women avoided using public hoppers, but not 'cause it makes them horny. It was hard for her to avoid at least occasionally having to use a public pisser. Once she was in, it was almost impossible for her to avoid at least fingering herself to a quick, quiet one, especially once her pants were already down. If the other stalls were empty, then she was pretty much doomed to play with herself, total mind blowing climax, biting her bottom lip till she cut into it.

What she found on the floor of Tabby's girls' room hit her from both sides. On the floor was a man with a large purpley knot on his forehead. Even though he was short, and unconscious and had a thick string of drool sliding from the right side of his mouth, he was kind of handsome and cradled in one of his hands was a tiny black box. Gwen was like a lush locked in a liquor store. The box was the perfect size to fill the empty spaces of her purse which made her hot.

Even though she sometimes thought about men when she

fingered herself, it was always in a far off way, just 'cause they have dicks kind of way. The warm flesh and heavy, stinking breath of a real human being would have totally killed the enjoyment of the impersonal, cold white tile that appealed to Gwen about the whole bathroom thing. But there on the floor in front of her was a perfect meeting of warm flesh and cold isolation. The temptation was just too fucking much, and with the door locked the likelihood of getting caught too little, for her to pass up.

First thing she did was put the black box in her purse. Then she turned herself back to the man on the floor. His sneakers were covered in green shit that had to be throw-up. Somebody had made a half-assed attempt to clean it up but had just smeared it around. The fella had a smile on his face even though he had that big bruise on his head, as if to tell you that that's how a lot of his better nights ended. Hector Verboten--that was his name-- wasn't really having a very good night. Mr. Moony, the bastard that runs F.E.C.A.L wanted to get ahold of that black radio box that Verboten had stole from him and had roughed him up pretty good to find out where it was. They'd let him escape hoping he'd go for where he'd hid it and he did, but he slipped on the wet toilet trying to gank it from on top of the ceiling tiles.

It was just as well Hector didn't get it. Even if he could have gotten past Umlaut and Tilde, Moony's German she-bitch killers who was waiting outside for him, he'd have only gone off to Mexico to hook up with Gringo and Madonna Diablo. "The Nazarene" had already put them down over another matter. Madonna was always warning Gringo that as long as he refused to go native killers would zoom in on his bald sunburned head like a bull's eye.

There wasn't no way Gwenneth could have known all that as she considered the possibilities. Even with the little chance that Hector might come to and without considering that he might be laying there dying, she took his pecker out of the confines of his pants. As good a lay as Gwen was, she wasn't good enough to make a knocked out man hard, so she couldn't really mount him

up right. Instead, she had to satisfy herself with sitting there on the floor beside him playing with herself and grabbing at his nut sack. Even so, she felt like it was twice as good as any sex she'd ever had with a live man.

And just like that, she was back in the smoke filled hall. The band was ending a set in the usual way--loud. Tabby would get on one knee and hold his guitar out to the audience like he was holding his sword out to the king or something. Then he'd bring the black and orange Les Paul knock-off towards his face and plant a kiss on it before raising it to the sky. It had been a cool finale when Tabby was young, but watching old Tabby try to stand again from a kneeling position was just depressing.

Neal was waiting in the hall outside the can just like Gwen knew he would be. He acted like he was startled to see her and almost collided with her. "Oh, hey," he said. "Hey," she said back to him. There was a conversation that happened in the time in between the two "heys" that nobody could hear out loud, but that mattered just the same.

"I hope you're as detached from your life as I am so we can have meaningless sex," Neal said without no words.

"Oh, at least that detached," Gwen said back without a sound, "I hope you realize I don't give a damn about you as a person, or how big your pecker is or how long you can keep it up."

"That's a relief, I don't need the pressure" he might have said back with swipe to his forehead. "I have a hard enough time just finding somebody who'll fuck me."

Neal didn't know all this was being said. He thought that they had only said their hellos. Gwen, even though she couldn't know it in her waking head, had some kind of knowledge of the stuff that happened between the words. "It's getting loud in here. You want to go somewhere?" she said seemingly out of nowhere. "Damn, that was easy," Neal thought and tried to take a gulp but his mouth was dry as dirt. He just shook his head. Without a word to anyone they left.

She drove him to The Temple Court apartment building right off LSU's campus and when she got out asked him, "You

want to come in?" He really, really did. He got out and followed her up a flight of stairs to an apartment labeled C4. As she dug her keys out of the tiny brown purse slung across her chest Neal noticed the heavy oak door. Instead of forming a perfect rectangle, the top of the door narrowed to an arch. On the door was some writing. "Sugite capita; edite caudaf," it said.

The sights that greeted Neal when Gwen opened the door dropped his jaw the rest of the way to the floor. It was like the seventies had stopped over for dinner and decided to stay for good. A velvet painting of a reclining woman, naked of course, with her legs spread was the thing that most caught your eye. The girl in the picture's perfectly parted head of hair kind of made you think of Carly Simon or some shit. Surrounding the picture and covering the rest of the wall was a bunch of homemade shelves that were home to a load of colored, just about shapeless glass bottles. It was not at all what Neal would have expected from the Gwen that he had made up in his head. "Nice apartment," he said as believable as he could.

"It isn't mine," she said from the back room she'd beelined to when they walked in. "Shit," Neal thought, "it's that Green motherfucker's." Neal hated the bastard without knowing him, but wasn't comfortable getting with Gwen right there in the guy's apartment. It was partly out of fear that they might be walk in on, but it was also cause he like he'd be violating some ancient rules of behaving dating back to his great, great however many great-grandpas who would come back to haunt him for violating the rules.

While Neal was arguing with himself, Gwen was in the back room getting rid of the black box she'd taken. She hid it under some extra sheets in the closet. Her purse seemed too empty, so she grabbed a blue and white scarf made to look like a clouded sky and shoved it into the bag to fill the void. When she came out of the bedroom she said, "Let's go." Neal couldn't have been more ready to get out of anywhere.

Neal asked Gwen to park near the stadium so that they could walk around. He told her it was 'cause he liked the night air or some bullshit like that. He did most of the talking, and it was a

kind of white noise to scare off any uncomfortable silence. Suddenly he had that unmistakable light bulb feeling that you get when it's a done deal and he knew he would be getting some. He'd 'spected it before, but fig'ed he could still fuck it up. After the light bulb went off over his head, he started to feel calm, the same way a drowning man feels right before his lungs go pop.

But before he could totally give in to fucking her, he had to make what he called his "pilgrimage." He had this tradition where he'd visit this statue near the law school building every time God was good enough to let him bag him one. The statue was bronze and made to look like a dead lawyer named Aubrey Fontenot who left the law school a bunch of money. It was life sized, which for Aubrey was 5'3", and sported a potbelly and big coke bottle glasses that sat at the end of his bronze nose. Fontenot had been the district attorney of Baton Rouge back in the fifties and won the election saying he'd run the hookers out of town. Like a good Louisiana politician, he was crooked as hell. The papers at the time liked to say "Fontenot's word is his bond--a negotiable one." Not only did he not end prostitution, he eventually married a sweet big-titted call girl named Scurrilous Madjagan. Less than a year after they got married, Fontenot wound up face down and dead, with his pants around his ankles in the lake behind his house. The state police said he was drunk and had passed out and then drowned trying to piss. Naturally, some folks said he was murdered. His wife and the guy she'd been fuckin' gas was the number one suspects.

Cause of how dumpy the statue of Fontenot was, and 'cause of Aubrey's colorful career and sorry death, the students nicknamed it the "statue of limitations." Neal started makin' visits to the statue after a long stretch of not gettin' any, he caught a piece from a randy girl from Chalmette (some boys called them Chalmatians). Neal and the girl that night the famine ended should've been caught by the police, but they weren't and Neal took it as a good luck sign. Ever since then, he'd always managed to re-route his dates to the spot where it happened even if only to say a thank you to the bronze god. It never occurred to him that he was an idolater.

At night, an over-bright floodlight behind the statue surrounded it in a halo. When Neal and Gwen were there in the glow, Gwen took the initiative and leaned in for a kiss. It was certainly not soft, or even passionate. What it was, was skillful and just well planned enough not to seem planned. Neal felt a stirrin' within, but Gwen wasn't anywhere near bein' wet. Only her little titties were genuinely charged, puttin' up a real but hopeless fight against the material of her silk flowered blouse, achin' to be free and lay their butterfly kisses on whatever they could touch. After that first kiss, Gwen and Neal stood, arms around each other's waists and locked eyes for a full .5 seconds before they couldn't stand it. "Let's go," she said to him in a hoarse whisper. He obeyed.

The RA at the desk of the West Avalon dorm didn't even blink when the couple came in. Neal and Gwen were not holding hands and for all the affection they showed, they could have been on their way to study. No one would have given a shit anyway, not in a boy's dorm.

Neal was sure he and Gwen wouldn't be interrupted by his roommate. The little troll never slept or showered and spent most of his time in the lobby playin' cards. They went into Neal's small, musty dungeon and he reached for the light switch, but Gwen stopped him by puttin' her hand over his on the wall. "Don't," was all she said and he obeyed, so they stood together wrapped in what light could survive runnin' down from the sky and through the mosquito net over the window hole. He kissed her neck real gentle like; it wasn't original but it was enough to get the whole thing started and to give her a chance to stop him. Without thinkin' about it, he started rubbing his hands down the thin cloth that covered her ass. When his fingertips reached the end of her way-too-short skirt, he started back again from the top.

Gwen didn't want some dipshit hypnotizing himself by runnin' his hands in circles over her ass, so she decided to turn things up a notch by stabbin' his mouth with her tongue deeper than was necessary or comfortable for him. Her tongue wrestled Neal's down like a dog going for another's throat to show it was superior. If he hadn't given some sign of submittin' she might

have ripped his tongue from his mouth, but through whatever vibes he was throwin' off, they both knew he'd given in.

He dropped to his knees, either to eat her out or 'cause she drained so much energy from him through his breath that he couldn't stand. Not trustin' him to find his way under her skirt, Gwen lifted it above her waist. Neal, even though his senses were kind of dull from alcohol, he managed to plant a careful kiss on Gwen's panties which gave him time to try and remember what came next. All he saw was blue, and he thought he was blind with drunkenness until he realized that his eyeballs were just pressed against the cotton of the her underwear. Pullin' his head back slightly, he giggled, noticin' how sturdy and comfortable the girl's underclothes looked to be. "Surprising, such a sensual girl in granny panties," he thought. He had figured that somehow, maybe 'cause she was so severe, that they worked for her.

After he figured he'd done enough lickin' that he wouldn't have to feel bad later, Neal came up for air. Gwen liked to keep her bikini line trimmed way back and her pussy looked to Neal like it had a bad toupee on. Gwen pushed him back on his bed to mount him up right, but when he fell back, only his head and upper back made it to the bed. His crotch and legs dangled over the edge so that he had to support himself crab-style so she could sit astride him. She was light, but by the time they finished their business his leg muscles hurt. After their business, they curled up together to sleep, not worried about their sweaty bodies or their unbrushed teeth because they was so tired and drunk. Neither one of them was exactly crazy about the idea of cuddling, but they was both too exhausted and dried from drinkin' and fuckin' to free themselves.

While he slept, Neal dreamed of nowhere. He hung suspended up in the air and could see a woman. She was naked and when he looked close he could see that she had Gwen's face. Her private parts were real invitin' but her pussy had Dracula fangs and a forked tongue that slipped in and out like a snake sniffin' the air. Two giant serpents curled and uncurled themselves from her legs and snapped at the air. Neal could see that instead of endin' in tails their bodies were evil angel's wings that went behind

her and into her back. Floatin' behind her at a distance and to the left of her was a black blob with a massive, pointy dick like a spear. Neal heard the sound of bells chimin' the hour and suddenly felt something bitin' at him. It was a fierce-lookin' dog floatin' behind him that tried to nuzzle its snout between his butt cheeks and rip out his asshole.

Without willin' himself to, Neal sat straight up in bed and opened his eyes and ran off the dream. He felt the little raw cut behind his neck where in the heat of it all Gwen'd scratched him. He made a face as he touched it but figured he probably deserved worse for fuckin' over his friends and ballin' some other guy's girl. "I'll have to apologize to James for punking out on them last night," he thought, but he knew he and James was casual enough to let something like that slide.

Neal's hangover rolled into town with the memories of all them embarrassin' things he'd done the night before riding shotgun. What bothered him most was not what he did but what he'd said. He noticed that Gwenneth had slipped out of the bed and sat buck assed naked in Neal's desk chair. She was smokin' a cigarette and blowin' her smoke on through the mosquito net over the window. Neal sat up on his elbows and asked her "You close to your family?"

"Enh," she said with a shrug.

"Me neither," which is what he would have said even if she'd said 'yes.' He was too drunk to listen but not drunk enough to shut up and go back to bed. "'Except my paw-paw. He's the only person in my family who wasn't scared to be a shithead openly. The rest of us are closet shitheads, but he was the genuine article.

"Paw-Paw wasn't precisely insane, but he suffered during the last years of his life from Alzheimer's or something like that. He tried to explain to me what it felt like. He said, 'Imagine like you're going through your life backwards. You get this great sense of perspective and this severe sense of terror as the present recedes in the distance and the past comes colliding headlong towards you. It is as if time were rolling backwards and instead of dying and ceasing to be, you're unborn and cease to be, like you

were Merlin or Billy Pilgrim.' Eventually, he completely lost it. I've heard it's common for Alzheimer's patients to start mistaking people for other people they knew when were younger, but he started mistaking people for himself and thinking he was somebody else."

"Just as strange was what stuck with the old man. He'd been a big time professor and even during those last days he could keep me reeling with the shit he knew and the stories. That and this hurt owl he'd found an kept always made him seem spooky."

Neal either didn't remember, or didn't want to remember some of the more embarrassin' things that Paw-Paw McGowen did. For instance, when Neal was takin' a English class and asked the old guy what he knew about Flannery O'Connor. The old man told him that O'Connor "was one sweet cunt," and Neal never could tell whether it was a bad answer or if he just didn't get it. Advice like that helps to explain why Neal liked kind of scary girls like Gwen.

Neal tried to dig into Gwen to try to find out what she was all about. "What's your family like?"

"White," she answered and so on through the night. Neal's stren'th wasn't enough to keep up with Gwen's resistance to his questions and he fell to sleep again. When he woke, Neal figured that Gwen had fled the scene of they crime against good taste. He figured it was strange she'd left behind her blue panties, balled up like a sleepin' mouse next to one of the cold metal legs of the bed. As he reached down for it, Neal's vision narrowed until the blue of the garment was all he could see. Then he surprised himself by taking the folded undies and opened the two halves like a book lookin' for some message left there. He couldn't know that she had just stepped out to shower some of the night off her in the bathroom across the hall. When she came back wet and wrapped in one Neal's towels, last nights clothes in hand and caught Neal playin' with her underwear she told him "don't stretch them out, they're not your size anyway." It would be the first almost human thing she'd say to him, probly cause it was he first time she'd seen him do anything that she wouldn't've easily guessed at. Neal just smiled back, though he didn't really mean it.

He'd fucked her and that meant he couldn't respect her no more. No woman that would like him was worth having by his figuring. Maybe if he'd known she didn't give a damn about him either way it would have made a difference. It sure made a difference a week later when he got drunk and horny and called her up. She'd given him the brush off, which meant she wasn't just some girl he'd fucked, but one that got away. He wanted her real bad after that.

Before she'd come back from the shower that mornin' after, Neal had tried to read somethin' into them discarded panties, like they was some kind of what-you-call-it, Shroud of Turin.

After she wouldn't talk to him, he thought about it more and more. To him, there was somethin' greater than the sum of the smell of all the bar-smoke and pussy juice that had got into them panties. It was full of a broken up kind of story in blue of all the nights that had made up the earth from the beginnin' and all the scratchin' and clawin' in lust or in hate that had gone on. Blue was perfect 'cause it was the color of the sky or of the mood or any of a million things. He knew he was makin' large of stuff that didn't mean nothin', but in the end he knew he had to string together the rags of sensations into a story or go crazy for lack of a point of reference, just like any of us would. Maybe he was Gawain and deservin' of a scratch but not no beheadin'. Maybe he was Satan meetin' his babies Sin and Death at the gates f hell, or maybe there was no difference. Maybe Tabby and us boys in the band are like some perfect king, all split in three after Camelot, his majesty in one, his coldness in another, his drive to fuck in a third. Maybe the gods, the trinity, the fires of creation fell down into the ancient heroes; the ancient heroes gave way to you and me; we'll give way to somethin' less and so on. Energy spends itself and levels off to one big almost nothin'. I just try to tell it to you, or maybe I just make it all up, but my energy is spent all the same. And maybe you're thinkin' I couldn't know most of what I'm sayin' 'cause I didn't see it or I couldn't know what was in somebody's head, or maybe you just don't want to believe that a nigger might know somethin'. I don't give a shit, 'cause like I said, what you believe about me says more about you than me.

End

A SMOKE FILLED TWILIGHT

All the lonely nights.
Sitting outside.
Alone.
Except my friend, the cigarette.
Sitting alone with my smoke looking at the night
sky.
Thinking of you.
Wishing you were by my side.
Keeping me warm.
Wishing you were mine.
Inhale the poison.
Exhale the pain.
Thinking of you.
Wondering why I couldn't have you.
Dreaming of a life together with you.
Wanting to live that dream.
Wishing for another chance.
Looking at the stars with tear filled eyes.
Looking with a heart saturated with pain.
Hoping against hope for another chance.
A chance for a dream.
A dream of a lifetime.
A lifetime with you.

Jzark



Antwinette Cofield

All the men I've loved before

*And as he reaches for me,
I tremble,
shaking with love and lust and fear.
And as he whispers sweet nothings,
I cry,
For I have to wonder, is this one real?
And as he leaves me for another,
I sigh,
for I knew it wouldn't last.
And as I see him from a distance
I know
I'm a page in his past.*

Sarah Whitehead

Nature will teach you
The power of riding the tide
And living life.

Sleeping Dragon

caught in a circle of eternity,
life is simply a step
confusion makes you dizzy and
the tears make you slip

Reven Enola



The Tragedy of Life

Jack Day

"Numerous parallels exist between the events of Hemingway's life and those of his characters. . .", Nick Adams is no exception (McMichael 1380). In reading "Indian Camp" and "Fathers and Sons", many similarities between Hemingway and Adams can be found. This stems from the fact that they had, for all practical purposes, the same father, "a well-to-do physician [who] initiated his son into the rituals of hunting and fishing and bequeathed to him a way of life, and of death" (McMichael 1379). They also shared traumatic experiences, both in World War I and in the suicide of their father, and follow virtually identical professions. Given this, it appears that the basis for Hemingway's The Nick Adams Stories is autobiographical. However, based upon the actions of Adams in "Now I Lay Me", "A Way You'll Never Be", and "Big Two-Hearted River", the result of the conflicts each individual has faced points to markedly different personalities. Both develop nihilistic views of the modern world, but while Hemingway strives to overcome this through acts of courage and living for the moment, Adams regresses into a state of shell shock. Adams' inability to effectively control critical factors in his life causes this regression, establishing him as a tragic character. The deciding factors include Adams' fear of personal death, his feelings of shame, and the inhumanity of war.

The leading factor to Nick's downfall is his fear of personal death. Although fear of death is hardly rare, whether for missing that which is life or for the fear of the unknown that is death, it is not generally omnipresent in the mind. It is understandable that Nick would be more focused upon death while he is at war, but the strength in his conviction against death is first seen during his youth. Although he encounters death often, being a hunter, his awareness of death does not seem to arise until "Indian Camp", in which he views the aftermath of a suicidal Indian. It is at this point that he convinces himself that his death will not come easily. Because of his fear, it is revealed in "A Way

You'll Never Be" that he must be drunk in order to lower his inhibitions enough so that he can fight in the war. Soon after this revelation, he takes a nap and has a dream about a yellow house near a canal, which frightens him terribly. Joseph M. Flora states in Hemingway's Nick Adams that "The frightening yellow house marks, apparently, the spot where Nick was when he was wounded. As such, it becomes the dream prefigurement of his death" (Flora 132). The dreams have become a plague in Nick's mind and as such we find in "Now I Lay Me" that he has devised ways to remain awake, fearful that ". . . if I ever shut my eyes and let myself go, my soul would go right out of my body.", a fear that has gripped him since ". . . I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back." He finds that he can only find solace in light, so he occupies his time in the darkness of night by mentally fishing the stream of his youth backwards and forwards using meticulous detail. On nights when he finds himself unable to think about fishing he recalls back as far as he can to all the people he had ever known, up until the point in which he reached the war, and pray for each of them. A final tactic he uses to occupy his mind is listening to sounds, as there are always sounds for him to listen to.

Nick's acknowledgement of the power his fear of death has over him creates the second factor of his downfall, shame. Despite what Nick tells Paravicini, he is ashamed that he lacks the courage to fight without being drunk. He is ashamed of his lack of ability to control his emotions as seen in his dream when he loses his Grappa in a cave-in. Upon waking from his dream, he realizes he's not alone which shames him even more. He attempts to hide his shame, but feels overpowered and soon finds that he cannot control what he is saying. As a result he turns a casual conversation about the American uniform into a virtual dissertation on locust, humiliating himself in the process. Another instance of his shame can be found in "In Another Country" when he admits that he didn't deserve the medals he had been awarded. Although he isn't ashamed of the ribbons themselves, he can't help but admit to himself that he could never do the things required to earn them properly because of his fear of

death. This point is especially interesting because Hemingway also received medals for valor that he felt he didn't deserve. Lastly, in "Fathers and Son", he thinks about his reactions to revelations to his fathers teachings, and about his father's suicide. Nick's shame has always been his own, yet when he reflects upon his father's teaching, as opposed to his own experiences, he feels shame in his father. This isn't too critical in and of itself, but more so in the fact that he feels his son may one day find shame in him. Thus we see that even in the end of the stories he still finds himself being controlled by his shame.

Although the final factor is actually a social factor, rather than a personal one, it affects Nick deeply because of its influence on the previous two factors, it being the inhumanity of war. One of the most obvious displays of such inhumanity is shown in "A Way You'll Never Be" when Nick comes across the multitudes of bodies strewn across a battlefield. He is disturbed by the fact that no one has taken the time to bury the dead, and more disturbed that, instead, the bodies have all been looted. An interesting observation of Nick's is the fact that "The hot weather had swollen them all alike regardless of nationality". The basic point behind this statement is that despite the different beliefs, races, religions, and other diverse elements that make up individuals, people are people and therefore should live in harmony. The entire basis for his mission in "A Way You'll Never Be" is disturbing to Nick because he knows that it's based upon a lie. Nick personally couldn't care less about being in the camp and knows that the American government feels the same. He knows that the government has no intention of sending the hordes of troops he promises the soldiers. Even his uniform, put together by an Italian, is incorrect, another representation of the deceit brought upon by war. What Nick does learn by the senseless slaughter and the duplicity of war is that mankind can be quite ruthless and evil. Given this, it is no wonder that Nick often times attempts to escape what is going on around him by dreaming about fishing the streams of Michigan. Even in "Big Two-Hearted River" when he finally does return home to the peace and serenity of the natural world, he cannot escape the

psychological scarring he suffered due to the war. As William Adair states, "... certain elements in the story-the fire-destroyed town, the burned-over countryside and fire-blackened grasshoppers. . . suggest images which he had seen during the war" (Adair 584). It is evident throughout the story that something traumatic had occurred within the earlier stages of Nick's life, and the physical landmark that appears to be the cornerstone for his anxiety is the swamp. Adair believes that the swamp is indicative of a specific event in the war in Italy, the Caporetto disaster and the swamp fighting around Portogrande, in which many lives were lost and nearly the war as well. (Adair 587) Flora, however, believes that the swamp represents the war as a whole. Drawing upon the methods Nick used to stay awake, Flora compares Nick's recollection of individuals as a stream of time, much like the stream he fishes, from which "He fishes and refishes. . . but always stops when he reaches the war. That black swamp he will save for a later time." (Flora 117) In addition, the swamp may represent the inner conflict that haunts Nick due to his fear of death and shame. Whatever the exact portrayal of the swamp may be, it is most certainly representative of a traumatic force in Nick's life.

It is these factors which separate the tragic life of Nick Adams from the vibrant life of Ernest Hemingway. However, an interesting observation commences with the examination of the closing points on each individual's life. At the end of "Fathers and Sons" the story turns somewhat optimistic as Nick and his son talk about the rest of their lives ahead of them. Hemingway, however, commits suicide, following the tradition of his father. The question may then arise as to who is truly more tragic. The answer is simple, the one who really lived, isn't.

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la Brea nth

i.

Sometimes I wonder.

What if this

were the last poem

I ever wrote?

What if the words no longer thundered?

If all the poetry

was drained out of me somehow,

maybe then.

Maybe.

Would I have something meaningful to say?

It seems all the great poets are extinct.

I wonder sometimes.

What if this inkwell runs dry?

No more love or sadness.

No more hate or gladness.

And this withered quill,

only a feather,

a fossil,

a fraction of a frightful bird

that could have flown.

ii.

Sometimes I feel stuck in this poem

as if this poem were my life

as if my life could be put to paper

as if that makes sense

and I don't remember

starting it
this poem I'm stuck in
or why I'm writing it anyway or
if reasons would make it better
and I don't think
I'm getting out
soon
or if it's even possible
to get out or
if it will end
I wish it were a good
poem though
this poem im stuck in
a poem that rhymed or
said clever things
or made people
weep – if it were a sonnet
perhaps it would be tolerable

iii.
sometimes
i am on the
verge of extinction
i sink
soon
sunk
quagmiring
in history
mystory
dragging

down
like
this poem im stuck in
and once
yur
down
deep
in it
deep in this poem
getting out
is
all
that
remains

iv.

How I decay
sweet flesh cling to me
 lewd toil
 crude oil
 O, sweet flesh,
how I wither away.

Clark Remedies



Pizza Slut

I never had body odor
before I worked the slut

now I wake up
every afternoon
ripe in my own smell
put on the lewd attire
pinching shoes, bra

I prostitute myself there
on a nightly basis
making sure my smile's
just right
I wait for my customers
and listen
to The Man
tell about
tonight's specials

the other girls hand around
sliding choice slabs
of The Man's greasy meat
through shiny lips
He offers, smiling
but I am no meat lover

I will not fuck The Man

I will work
the salad bar
I will clean





the john
but baby,
I'm no one's
all-you-care-to-eat buffet

he keeps me on anyway
pretends not to notice

(I'm really good with
the customers)

but if I'm working you
kidz 12 and under
do NOT eat free (except
tuesday, the man insists)

I have to take them all
singles, couples, big groups,
I spread myself out on their
tables for a dollar or two
or nothing

The Man pays me hourly

so I just put on my smile
and some perfume
and wait
alone- the other girls
have long left
but I, have
not yet mastered the art of
getting off.

Medusa



The Color of Language

Sandy Baber

The differences between black English and white English continue to be a controversial topic. Many people have theories concerning the reasons for dialectal differences, but most of the theories are bogus attempts to explain something that many people do not understand—the combination of several languages and aspects of languages to form a completely independent and functional dialect. It has been stated that black English (BE) has had no affect on white English (WE), but this is not true; black dialect has been an influencing factor on white dialect since the beginning of slavery. Although BE is a completely different dialect from WE, it has its own set of unspoken rules that form a dialect that is not inferior to any other variation of the English language.

Many people wonder why the language of black Americans separates them from the general population of white Americans, but no one can decide on the reason. There are several theories that attempt to explain the reasons for language differences between the black and white races, but “perhaps the most odious, and basically racist, explanation of BE is the large-lips/lazy-tongue/innate ability explanation—in all its varieties. Some black people have even accepted this explanation and believe that it accounts for pronunciation of, for example, ‘both’ as ‘bof,’ or ‘asked’ as ‘axed’”(Bently 3). This theory is not very widely accepted because it is obvious to most logical people that “Racial explanations that attribute language differences to the lips, tongue, or genes of speakers must be dismissed as myths simply because so many Americans with black skin speak indistinguishably from whites”(Burling 111). For this reason, most people do not believe that language differences between the races can be attributed to the physical appearance of the races. The next theory, however, is no more successful in explaining the language differences than the first because it is based on the premise that improper uses of language is a direct result of ignorance. Some people rely on the theory of “language deprivation or upon the less sophisticated but

basically equivalent notion that people speak 'bad' English because they are too ignorant to speak in any other way"(Burling 111). Fortunately, this theory is not very widely accepted either. The language difference between the black and white races do not depend on ignorance any more than they depend on physical appearance. Robert H. Bently makes a good point about physical appearance when he states, "Notice that when our late president, John F. Kennedy, pronounced 'Cuba' as 'Cubir' and 'barn' as 'bahhn,' nobody accused him of having 'large lips and a lazy tongue'! In both cases, the explanation is the same: *dialect*"(3). Dialect is defined as a "variety of language with nonstandard vocabulary, pronunciations, or grammar"(Oxford 204). Looking at all of the theories and all of their improbabilities, the theory of dialect seems to be the most logical explanation because it does not presume anything about the speaker of the language or make sweeping generalizations about the members of a specific racial group. Instead, it roots the differences in language usage in history.

The "dialectal hypothesis" is a good explanation for nonstandard uses of the English language. Although uses of the English language have changed through the years, it is easy to look back into history and see where some aspects of black dialect are rooted. "Multiple negation and double modal, for instance, were widely used in Elizabethan times, and we can quite properly credit the nonstandard dialects that retain these patterns today with preserving ancient usages"(Burling 112). While BE has kept some of the ancient traditions of the language, it has also changed some of the rules followed by ancient and modern English speakers. For example, BE is unique in that it drops the third person singular -s. "We have here exactly the kind of situation we expect to find when two dialects draw apart from an older common source. Each preserves some old characteristics. Each makes its own innovations. Black English, then might be looked upon as a dialect no different in kind from any other English dialect, one descendant among many of an earlier form of English"(Burling 112). It is easy to see that BE is a dialect that has developed from ancient roots and is constantly evolving

because it combines ancient uses of the language with the changes brought about with each new period.

BE is a combination of the English language and the native languages of the men and women brought from Africa as slaves. Thrown into a culture that spoke a language that probably resembled none they had previously heard, the slaves were forced to find some common language to communicate not only with each other, but, more importantly, with their masters. Bently says:

The linguistic legacy attributed to the Black man in the Western Hemisphere was that of a slave transplanted here from Africa who was capable of speaking only an unintelligible, savage gibberish. In order to adapt to these new surroundings, he slowly began to acquire a semicivilized mode of communication. (105)

Slaves began to form a common, yet simple, language that made it possible for them to communicate with one another sufficiently. The type of language that evolved is known as a pidgin language and is a simplified medium of spoken communication that allows people of different linguistic backgrounds to communicate. "Pidgins typically have few inflectional endings or irregularities, and their vocabulary may be limited. At the most extreme they are little more than a series of words strung together to communicate essential information"(Burling 113). While the language allowed them to communicate with their masters, the simplicity of the language was misconceived as a reflection of the intelligence of the slaves. This only shows the ignorance and arrogance of many of the masters, who foolishly expected the slaved to be able to communicate with them in English. However, as Robins Burling points out:

They would have had little opportunity to hear or to imitate the colloquial speech of whites, but they could easily have imitated

one another. Their pidgin became an echo of the master's language but deviated widely from it, and so long as it was used by native Africans, it could be expected to reflect the words, grammar, and pronunciation of their native African languages as well. (113)

The forming of this pidgin language was more difficult for slaves than for many other ethnic groups because, unlike most other countries, Africa has four distinct languages that are spoken in different regions. Slaves from various regions were put together on a plantation and, therefore, could not even understand each other. If they could at least understand each other, the transformation of languages would probably have taken place much faster than it did. However, the slaves managed to overcome the different language barriers and form a common language that allowed them to communicate. This mixture of languages served its purpose for the slaves until they became proficient enough in English that they did not have to depend on the simple pidgin language any longer. However, this change did not take place overnight. It took generation for the language to accumulate the necessary vocabulary, pronunciations, and grammar to be able to speak with the same proficiency as the white people who were natives to the English language.

Although it is obvious that the language of black people was greatly affected by the language of white people, many people argue that the native African languages of black people had absolutely no influence on the English language. J. L. Dillard find this theory to be completely absurd as he writes:

That theory which will not allow for innovations on the part of the Negroes themselves, and which of course will not allow for the spread of Negro dialect features to the whites, is in effect (although probably unintentionally) the most racist

theory of all—that of racial ‘archaism.’ Even the ‘thick lips theory is kinder to the Negro: A man might suffer from a physical handicap lips thick lips or a cleft palate and be as bright as the next man, although handicapped; but the man who, being physiologically normal, simply remains a hundred years or so behind the times must be mentally deficient. (190)

Dillard is opposed to any theory that does not give proper credit to black English as having influenced the English language. He believes that Southern speech is very much like black dialect because Southerners, especially wealthy plantation owners, were raised with the black dialect. The children of plantation owners had black nursed, servants, and playmates and were, therefore, exposed to the language from a very early age. For this reason, many Southerners (especially women who were limited in their ability to leave the plantation and were, therefore, more exposed to the black dialect) were bidialectal and diglossic. Although it might not have been intentional, due to constant exposure to black dialect, their speech patterns imitated that of the slaves. Some families were opposed to the changes in speech, but others were more open to the change. There are records showing that some mothers were concerned with the change in speech patterns due to social status, while others were completely unconcerned. Most masters of the plantations spoke black dialect, or something very close, in order to communicate with the slaves. With all of this mixing of dialects, it is very clear that BE did influence WE to a great degree.

Although BE has influenced WE, the two operate out of two completely different modes of speech. The modes are so different that:

the same or similar terms have entirely different meanings for the two groups.

man is that while the linguistic deviations of other ethnic groups are seen as natural and changeable in time, the white society has invented a theory of racial inferiority to explain black language differences.
(Haskins 40)

This shows that the rise of black dialect has made white people insecure in their dialect and has, therefore, caused them to attack the black race as well as BE. Although many people believe that WE is better than BE, there is absolutely no proof for this theory. It is a basic doctrine of linguistics that "within a large complex society where individuals from different social classes and different ethnic origins speak different dialects of the same language, one of these dialects may be considered more socially prestigious than the other, and thus may be used as the standard of the nation"(Haskins 40). Each society has a particular dialect that is preferred over the others, but that does not mean that one dialect is better grammatically than any other dialect. Instead, rating of different speech patterns and dialects is a way of differentiating between social classes. Each dialect, no matter what social status it receives, has its own rules and regulations that must be followed in use of the language. In support of this, Haskins says:

Studies have shown that, far from being an arbitrary collection of bad standard English, black English is a bona fide language system with its own rules of grammar, vocabulary, and structure. In other words, as black people have known all along, there is a correct way to pronounce words and a correct grammar to be used when speaking the nonstandard black dialect. (40)

Although the rules of dialect are not taught in the classroom, there is a definite set of rules that must be followed in order to use the

dialect properly. The extend of these grammatical differences are sometimes marked by the enormous amount of shared vocabulary of WE and BE, but they definitely exist.

Although there are several theories concerning the differences between black English and white English, the "dialectual hypothesis" is the best explanation. This theory shows that BE is not improper use of the language, but, rather, a mixture of historical language aspects and modern innovation. BE combines these aspects with the native African languages of the slaves to form a completely different dialect. The black dialect has influenced WE since the time that slaves were brought over to work on plantations. Although many people think that BE is inferior to WE, there is absolutely no proof for this theory. BE has a complete set of unspoken rules that are followed by those who speak the language. Contrary to the opinion of many people, BE is a perfectly sound dialect that is equivalent to any other language variation or dialect. Although it will probably be a long time before BE is accepted, the language will continue to thrive.

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He Command His Angels To Guard You
Elizabeth Patchen

Memories

*Red roses replace
cold stone to mark
your passing.
I think of the roses-
soft, fragrant,
beautifully radiant in the
middle of summer,
and I am reminded of
both of you-
soft, affectionate,
true friends.*

*I know why God took you...
He wanted the best
feline companions
for Himself.*

Kelly Kathleen



Tuffi
Danyelle Guillory

Girl's Inquiry of the Willow

Weeping Willow,
Why do you weep for me?
I am not dead,
though some say I may as well be.
They say I do not live a life worth living,
and I tread this earth alone.
No one to comfort me,
no place to call home.
So, weeping willow, by the sea,
Why is the World are you crying for me?

Willow's Reply

I do not weep for thee,
I weep for me,
I was so naïve,
to let you plant me by this sea.
Did you foresee
the problems you would create for me,
when you planted me by this sea,
where my roots cannot grow,
and there are no other trees to comfort
me?
Tell me, what were you thinking
when you planted me by this ungrateful
sea?

Sparrow

Vampire @ 4:00 am

wide-eyed

trembling shaking hands

i drain life for each & every black drop i can

the first sip is hot & hard

as the devil's cock

the last as cold & misunderstood

as i

another cup & i will tell you a secret

the only secret i know

it's an egg cracked open

straight black coffee

sleep without dreams

there is no secret

the only secret i know

the only secret

it all boils down

a black crust @ the bottom of the pot

i want so much to dream again

to sleep

my veins are filling with the blackness

my heart percolates with the night

& cools

when tomorrow comes

and the sun is fried

i will try to remember the good dreams

Clark Remedies

You Must Give to Receive: The Relationship Between Author and Audience Beckie

Everyday readers do not consider the psychological aspects of the simple act surrounding their task; nor do many authors intentionally seek to address one particular group of literate individuals while disregarding other readers' ideas and opinions. The author and reader relationship is dependant on an understanding about the interests of both, namely to communicate through print media thoughts of events deemed important. As the author cannot exist without the reader, so the reader depends on the author for textual indications of how the work is to be deciphered. This one-to-one communication requires both sides to give and to receive in an interesting and illuminating compromise.

The current debate among literary scholars questions whether or not the author's intentional focus on an audience during the composition stage of a text helps or hinders the composition itself (Willey 26). By taking the time and considering the weight of each word in each sentence, the writer most assuredly assigns him- or herself the daunting task of always second-guessing the words that come to mind. In conversational arenas participants rarely give forethought to each spoken word before it leaves their mouths; natural-sounding writing should be done in the same way. Professional writing that demands a more business-like approach can understandably be expected to contain more highbrow words to demonstrate the rhetor's knowledge of not only the subject, but also the jargon native to that genre of literature or ideas. In that instance the writer composes for the validation of his or her opinions to a more knowledgeable audience who expects such a linguistic effort to be made successfully.

In writing classes the young writer is always reminded to consider to whom he or she is writing and to phrase the argument appropriately (Long 73). Unfortunately for them, students often

write for their true audience, the professor. The single-minded focus of composition, which is too often the limitation placed on the work by both the students and the professor, hampers the creative process by not allowing the student to exercise the intellectual possibilities of a much broader audience or to learn the process of writing in realistic situations. Not only is the composition strangled by the professorial intimidation, but also the analysis performed by the student during the composition often effects the writing in a negative way, culminating with unsubstantiated claims and ineffectual proofs.

Recently professors have begun eliminating the question about the supposed audience by assigning the student to compose for a predetermined group of people with comparable educational backgrounds or similar degrees of interest (Colavito Assignment 4). By merely describing the audience as a real group of readers out in society, the rhetor and audience are separated into an almost didactic situation where rhetor knows all and reader knows none (porter xi). This composing may seem less daunting for writing to a dramatically eclectic audience, such as the newspaper readers in a big town. For students or beginning writers, the perception of the audience as a group of friends insures that the writing will be more natural and exhibit better coherence (Herrick 12).

"Rhetorical messages are planned with an audience in mind" (Herrick 12). Supposedly, whenever writers sit down with pen in hand, they immediately conceive of a group of people to whom the work they are creating will be presented. Considering this, it should be completely understandable that the audience influences the author's writing style and organization (Porter x). A paper written to request financial backing for a research endeavor and presented to the faculty of a large university would not be appropriate to submit to an elementary school reading class for study hour. Deciding upon a method of presentation is often the hardest part about writing for an unknown audience, and the same rhetoric would not be appropriate for widely varied groups of readers or listeners.

A.E. Darbyshire proposed the notion that there are stages

in the communication process involving the responsibilities of both the writer and the reader (Long 76). The writer makes a conscious decision to detail certain facts, opinions, etc., to the reader. The writer translates his or her experiences or thoughts into written language and makes these encoded ideas available. The reader receives this information and decodes or interprets what he or she has been given into an account of happenings that the reader then places into his or her own store of personal knowledge. From this interpretation, the meaning of the text is either discovered or questioned, and both participants have played a part in the composition of the work.

Since audience has such a powerful effect on the writing, the author should learn when are the best times to allow for the audience (Elbow 259). If the author imagines a supportive audience cheering on the writing, then the composition and the writing process will both be better structured and easier to create. If that same author conceives of a critical audience, a misconception often embodied by the professor, then the composing is more difficult and more easily blocked. The imaginary supportive audience creates an atmosphere of tolerance and enjoyment concerning the writing, while the imaginary critical audience causes the student to immediately become defensive about his or her opinions.

The audience is usually perceived as a handful of actual individuals listening to an oral version of the story and absorbing the rhetor's words passively (Porter x). When a student decides to write for an unknown audience, he or she may timidly construct the argument without making assertive claims about personal interpretation, thereby weakening the work (Elbow 260). Conversely, a presenter may become emboldened by the challenge of such an opportunity and speak more forcefully than usual. The personality of the writer comes to bear when the audience has no specific idiosyncrasies of which the writer is cognizant.

The audience serves a very important role in the composing process and, in essence, dictates what the author will say and how (Porter xii). The delineation of the audience's

importance and influence is an accepted part of the literary world, but the writer must still determine the qualities of the audience before this knowledge can affect his or her particular writing style. Writing textbooks instruct the writer to question the nature of the intended readers so as to determine the interests and dislikes of the group. Theoretically, this practice will inform the writer with all he or she needs to know before composing; however, the reader changes even so much as during the material being read.

The reader and the writer both enter a place of understanding with some fundamental human characteristics that make the terms of agreement unspoken and yet mutually understood: each person has a childhood-to-adulthood maturation or imminence experience, and each person lives in a society that is governed by rules (Rosenblatt 27). The very fact that the words of the author makes sense to the reader gives the text a redeeming quality of humanity and communicability. The action of communicating through words "requires profound knowledge that most speakers are unaware of" (Fromkin 4). Already the mutuality of the text has demonstrated to both participants the humanistic qualities inherent in composing and reading.

The reader can help create a meaning of a text by reading and attempting to decipher the words (Porter 63). When that action takes place, the reader must analyze the words and ideas presented and formulate a response. Some responses are natural and do not require and extraneous thought; being moved to tears or laughter in one reading, for example. Even multiple readings of the same text can engender different reaction because of the added bonus of time and experience (Manguel 10).

Just as there are different kinds of authors composing, there are also different types of readers reading. Sometimes an individual may move quickly through a text so as to get all the information about the protagonist's actions without focusing on compositional detail (Manguel 13). That plot-interested reader may give way to the careful absorber that is interested in the linguistics and structure that give the work its style. The type of literature that is being read also influences the reading style of the audience, since readers often accept the role presented them by the

author when the text is of a particular genre.

A community of literature involves relationships that are constantly being changed even throughout the deciphering process (Long 77-78). The writer may begin composing with one view of an argument but, as the work progresses, may entirely change perspective on the issue and begin to see the opposite side. The topic that is being presented by the author may relate to the audience in one way but, by the author's presentation, suddenly appear clearer in a different interpretation. The audience may have preconceived ideas about the type of writer, just as the writer may stereotype his audience; but the two may reach different understandings about the other after the text is considered and pondered. The broad range of available literature suggests that this static world of change is allowed and expected.

By handing people material to read and then giving them an outlet to express their opinions about the text, the discovery of textual meanings opens up the world of literary works beyond the scope of scholarship and academia. The meaning of a work, therefore, is not a sentence struck out of a manuscript and defining the moral of the story or the focus for the debate. The textual meaning is something that is sketched by the author, shaded by the text, and finally fully drawn by the readers or audience (Porter 63). A textual work is not the creation of one person but a compilation of efforts and expressions due to a group of people who may never meet or witness each other again. The effects of the meeting leave a distinguishing mark on the author, the reader, and the text.

There is no absolutely correct perception regarding the interpretation of a work or the current opinion of the author. The ambiguous nature of written language leaves individuals with no choice but to extract from the text itself an adequate reading that involves all parts of the story with appropriate emphasis on each (Long 77). The author may convey a message that the reading public may totally miss, just as the readers may demand a writing style of one type that is best presented by someone else. The reader will see in the text parts of his or her own existence and experiences as well as those of a novel character with

extraordinary circumstances and expectations. All in all, the reader and the writer must contribute a part of themselves for the completion and total makeup of the work to call it a success.

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Misty Pope

After the Stroke

Your Elvis picture book
sits on your lap-
its pages too heavy to turn.

Your left hand cradles
a little koala bear toy-
and insufficient gift-
that proudly displays its name
on a fuzzy white chest

K E L L Y

marked in permanent black ink
with unsteady hand, to remind you
of a friendship that
should be unforgettable.

You stare, between gazes
at Elvis and his guitar,
at the quiet, austere, sterile box
they call a room.

Monotony rules this terrible kingdom
with an iron fist and a
spotless nurse's uniform.

Sighing, you wearily close your eyes
as a single tear slides down my cheek.

Kelly Kathleen

Poisonous Deception

Robin Higginbotham

"So what have you got for me this time, Charlie?" asked detective James White.

"It's another poisoning, this time with ammonia," answered Dr. Charles Aucoin, the parish coroner, "The liquid burnt the hell out of his skin, but the actual cause of death was suffocation from a swollen larynx due to the fumes."

"His name was Mike Bertrand. He was found tied up in his office and his clothes were soaked through with the stuff," James explained.

A quick chill ran through the bones of James White. He had been investigating cases for nearly ten years and he had never seen a string of deaths so cleverly executed. During the course of the past year there had been 17 deaths by poisoning. All of them were cleanly done without a trace of hard evidence. No prints, no hair, no bloods and no skin to help identify the killer. However, there was a connection between all of these deaths. They were all men who had been members of the same fraternity on the same college campus thirteen years ago. More importantly, James had been one of them.

He had been searching desperately for a motive since he made the connection, but had come up short time and time again. He kept his involvement a secret from everyone, including his wife who was a toxicologist and had been helping him, so that he could stay on the case. He just prayed that he figured it out before he fell victim to this murderer.

"Looks like he got a big blow to the back of the head that knocked him out so that he could be easily tied up," continued Dr. Aucoin, "But, the marks on his wrists and ankles show that he struggled to get free. The killer probably waited until he was conscious again before drenching him with ammonia."

"Keep me posted, Charlie. As soon as you find another poison victim, you let me know, OK?" James requested.

"Sure thing, James. I'll call you the minute I know something," responded Dr. Aucoin.

Back at home, James could not stop contemplating when and where and under what circumstances he would find the killer. James had never missed on a case. He always got his man. But, this case baffled him. Not only did he have a personal stake in it, he had never seen such craftiness on the part of the killer. There had already been 17 killings and there were a limited number of men who were in this particular fraternity. He did not know how much time he had left.

"Raquie, honey, how fast does carbon monoxide kill?" James asked his wife, "I need to know for my investigation of the new poisoning case."

"Well, Sweetheart, it depends. If the space is small and the concentration is high, it could take on a few seconds to receive a fatal dose. If the place is ventilated and the concentration is low, CO exposure may not even kill you," answered Raquelle.

Raquelle and James had been married for only two years. She was 8 years his junior and they had married when she graduated from college. She had left Louisiana when she was in high school, but where she went was a mystery to James. She had moved back for college and graduated in toxicology. She now worked in poison research for the parish's poison control center. She had worked there only for the past two years.

"What do you do at work anyway, Baby?" asked James curiously.

"What do you do at work, Nosy?" retorted Raquelle.

Raquelle was very beautiful and extremely intelligent, but she was never really open with James. She had lost her parents at age fifteen when they were in a car accident. That was about all James knew of her past. He had only known her since her senior year in college. She pushed to get married and he didn't refuse.

"I gotta tell you, Baby, this poisoning case has really got me," explained James, "There is never any hard evidence. The killings are very calculated and remarkably well planned."

"What are you going to do next?" asked Raquelle.

"I don't know exactly, but I'll catch the guy," boasted James, "I always find the truth."

The next day James was sitting in his office looking at all of the files on the poison victims. At first the deaths had looked like accidents. The first to go was Tony Ortego. He had gotten trapped in the hold of a ship and died of CO₂ poisoning. The second was Johnny Soileau, who had 'accidentally' taken an overdose of his heart medication, digitalis. The third was Larry Foret, a notorious insomniac, who had taken an overdose of barbitol. The fourth was Nick Landreneau, a disgraceful drunk, who was found lying dead on his kitchen floor from ethanol poisoning.

These were all declared accidental deaths, but as the poison victim numbers increased, the deaths became increasingly more violent. The fifth death was the result of aconite poisoning. David Miller went into a restaurant and had a salad. The radishes were switched with sliced aconite. The restaurant was blamed and closed down. The next three deaths all happened at the same time. Jon Reed, Jack Smith, and Chris Fusilier were all poisoned in the same coffee shop. Jon with cyanide, Jack with nicotine, and Chris with atropine. They were all dead within five minutes, all the while shrieking and contorted. There was no way that any of these deaths could be called accidental. That was when the investigation began. It is also when James began to see the association between the fraternity and the deaths.

The next poisoning happened to Scott Ryder. Known to always cut himself badly while whittling, his carving knife had been dipped in curare, an ancient arrow poison. He asphyxiated on his art shop floor. The Jacob Gore had some antimony slopped into his coke at lunch time at his office. He died the next day very yellow from liver damage. Max Fruge had been poisoned with carbon monoxide by a cylinder of pure CO that was rigged to open when his car door closed. Wesley Lafleur had phosphorus put into his breakfast one day at work. He died three days later because of fatty infiltration of the liver and liver failure. They couldn't trace any of these because they all occurred where people were in and out all of the time. Everyone was always so busy that no one ever saw anything. There was also lack of motive in every single poisoning case.

The next phase of killings were all done with a syringe and in the homes of the victims. Gary Brown was injected with mercury. He was found in a pool of his own vomit, diarrhea and blood. Philip Berzas had the same treatment except he was injected with arsenic. He was found the same way. Chad Villain was injected with chloral hydrate and found swollen as road kill. All these men were left to writhe in pain for days having been given just enough poison to kill, but not right away. It was now clear that, not only did this killer know exactly what he was doing, he was on some kind of vendetta and was saving the most hated for last.

The last couple of killings had been of the worst nature. Sam Fontenot, who had become a politician, had been poisoned with strychnine just as he was about to give a speech. So there he was with spasms and convulsing in front of a crowd of people before falling dead, totally stiff with a big grin frozen on his face. Finally, the most recent killing, Mike Bertrand, who had been doused with ammonia. Now, with all of his former fart brothers dead and the violence of the murders increasing, James was watching his back every minute.

During the next week James would go nowhere without constantly scanning the crowd wondering who the slayer was. He didn't eat or drink anything in public. He make sure that if he was going somewhere that he or his wife packed it before he left his house. He wasn't going to fall victim to this murderer. He would make sure of that.

On Saturday he received a call from the station telling him that important new information on his case had come up. He went down there right away. He was sent to Dr. Aucoin's office once again. "What have you got for me this time, Charlie?" James asked as usual.

"This one is just like the last one, Jimmy, except potassium hydroxide was used in place of ammonia," offered Dr. Aucoin, "This one's name was Jesse Ardoin. Wasn't he your friend, James?"

"Yes, he was," James admitted.

James had never lost touch with Jesse since college. They

were still good friends and they got together every now and then, with their wives, to have dinner. He should have told Jesse what was going on. He felt as if he would explode. He couldn't contain his rage at himself for not being able to solve this case and at the killer who just would not let himself be known.

That night at home he broke the news to Raquelle, "Honey, I hate to tell you this, but Jesse is dead. He was brought into the coroner's office this morning."

"Darling, I am so sorry. I know that you have known him a very long time. I just hope that Dana is all right. Do you think I should call her?" asked Raquelle.

"No, I don't think that would be a very good idea, Raquie. The woman is probably much too distressed right now to handle condolences," James went on, "I just can't think of who would do such a thing and why. Why kill all of these people? I just don't understand."

"I'm sure it will come to you one day. I know it will," said Raquelle reassuringly.

The next month James and Raquelle were planning to attend a police banquet sponsored every year by the police department. This year Raquelle wanted to look very special for the occasion, "James, where are my black heels?"

"I don't know, Sweetheart. Look under the bed," suggested James. "Why are you so worried about tonight?" asked James curiously, "I have never seen you so worded up."

"I'm not worked up. I don't know what you mean. I am perfectly calm," retorted Raquelle.

"Whatever." James gave up.

Later on, they headed out to the party. Once they arrived there they were greeted by the chief, "Well, hello there James, Raquelle. You are both looking nice tonight. How's everything going?"

"Just fine chief. Have you got any new information for me on the serial poisoning case?" asked James, never leaving his work.

"Not just yet. This one is a sly one," the chief answered. One of James's colleagues, Ricky Deshotel, was listening and

watching. He jumped into the conversation, "Chief, maybe I should join James on this case. I have enough experience and I think two on the job would be better than one."

James knew that he had figured it out. Ricky was also a member of his college fraternity. Working on the force, and knowing about the case, he was probably just as scared as James.

"I suppose it couldn't hurt," said the chief. "Go ahead, Ricky. You're now on the case." The chief left to find his table. Ricky walked over to James, "Can I speak to you in private?"

"I'll just go powder my nose," Raquelle said, bowing out graciously.

"Okay, Honey," he called after her. He turned to Ricky, "So you've figured it out too then."

"James, let me tell you, I don't know what to do. I can't eat. I can't sleep. Why is someone out to get us?" Ricky asked sounding tortured.

"It must have been something we did way back when, but I can't think, quite literally for the life of me, what would deserve an execution of this sort," answered James sounding defeated.

"Well, we did what most other frats did. We drank a lot of beer and had sex with a lot of women," Ricky declared, "Who would possibly harm us for that?"

"You know, Ricky, I just had a thought. We did have sex with a lot of women--and shared most of them. What if this killer is a woman? I never even considered that. What if *she* is a frat whore on revenge?" contemplated James.

"James, that is completely ridiculous. I never heard of such a thing. Those girls knew what they were doing. They were just hookers," said Ricky.

"Yeah, I guess you're right. It was a stupid idea," James said finally.

They both found their seats at their respective tables and James rejoined Raquelle.

"Look, Baby, at the pretty name tags," said Raquelle, "aren't they cute?"

"Yeah, they're cute," said James very distractedly.

Everyone had been served coffee. James wasn't about to

drink a drop of it. The meal was supposed to come later and he probably wouldn't eat any of that either. The speaker was just about to begin when suddenly from the other side of the room came the sound of coughing. James looked over to find Ricky with his head in his napkin blowing his nose and wiping his eyes as if he had been crying of something. James dismissed it. About 20 minutes later Ricky excused himself from the table and went to the bathroom. James followed him. He found him vomiting, "Ricky, are you all right, man?"

"I'll be okay. I just have a bug or something," answered Ricky.

"Did you eat or drink anything tonight?" demanded James.

"Just some coffee," Ricky replied. So it's someone inside, thought James.

"I think you better carry yourself to the hospital and fast," recommended James.

James accompanied him to the hospital and they did some blood work on him. They found that he was poisoned with acetylene tetrachloride. They gave him an emetic, but it had already been too long since he had ingested the poison. There was no antidote. By midnight, he was dead.

James sat with him until he died. He watched him squirm in misery while his liver and kidneys shut down. He felt so helpless, and so alone. He was so frightened of what his fate would be. He thought of the police department. Who could be the one? Who hated the frat? It didn't make sense.

Giving up, he headed for home. He needed the comfort of his wife right now. He walked through the door and said, "Honey, I can't believe the night I've had. Ricky is dead. He was poisoned at the banquet. That means it is someone on the inside who is responsible for the poisonings." As he was putting his coat away he felt a big blow to the back of his head and fell to the floor.

When he woke up, he was tied up and she was waiting to explain. "I know that Ricky is dead, because I killed him."

As he began to see through the blur he realized that it was Raquelle who had said the words. The truth began to dawn on him. Incredibly hurt and astonished at this betrayal, James asked,

"Why? What reason could you possibly have for killing us?"

"I knew you would never figure it out. You don't remember me do you? I visited that God-forsaken frat house the night of a big party when I was only fifteen years old. I was a little awkward and chubby then. I've changed a lot since. That's why I knew you wouldn't recognize me. Men usually never see past their pants anyway. I knew that you would never suspect me, because you wouldn't know why I really was. That night I was gang raped by a bunch of your buddies," Raquelle said very calmly. "I moved away with my parents because they wanted me to be able to forget the whole thing, but I couldn't forget it. After they died I had nothing left to live for except to see that all of you bastards were dead. That is when I put my plan into motion. My toxicology degree and my marriage to you--it was all part of the plan. I had to get close to one of you so that I could find out about all the rest. I would choose one victim at a time and keep them under close surveillance until the right time."

"But, I never raped anybody," begged James. "It was those jerks Nick and Larry that did all of that stuff and they died relatively peacefully."

"That idiot, Nick, drank himself to death before I could get to him. The rest of them were unimportant. I saved you for last and for the worst death because you were the bastard who just watched and did nothing about it. You could have done something," finished Raquelle.

"There was nothing I could do," pleaded James, "the situation was out of control."

"There was nothing I could do then," explained Raquelle, "but there is now."

She grabbed a bucket of formic acid from under the table and dumped it on him little by little, with him screaming all the while. His skin immediately burned and fumed and began to blister. The blisters spread all over his body until he was covered with them. In the last stages of his torture, pieces of his skin began to fall off, showing the muscle and flesh beneath. After a few hours he was dead.

Raquelle turned to him finally and said, "Detective White, this is one case you will never solve."

*Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, with the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.*

--T.S. Elliot, *The Wasteland*

I. Drawing Down the Rain

he dances boldly
a small circle completely
in his hands tomahawking the air
there is medicine in his voice
and it rises
up to the cloudless sky
begging ancestors
he dances one-footed
faster
as if he were derailed
seeking explosions
instead of rain
observes the cerulean sky
questions in a look
and like deserts
he dances on

II. Dreaming the Rain

the visions
are not of buffalo
are not of anything
but the rain
that one wetness
that chases the thunder
like a coyote
the same rain that
fathered and
will bury mankind
that undeniable
drop drop drop

beat beat beating
repeating drop drop drop
of a midsummer lullaby
(in his sleep he can taste it)

III. Drinking the Rain

it comes too quickly-
barely time to remember
even a faint drop

IV. Drought

he dances boldly
a small circle completely
feeble in his song
wanting it too badly
the sky is dark like his skin
and dry
always dry
forever dry
he dances
 stumbles
advances
trying so desperately
to finish one more circle
his throat is dry
refuses to sing
begs for silence
grates constantly
he dances past forgiveness
the earth sucks his sweat
thirsty for the rain
his song a whisper
overfilling with his
father and grandfather
he dances
trying to reach the sky
 to be noticed
 to survive

trying
he wails with song
he gropes for dry clouds
he dances
 stumbles
dances
 stumbles
dances
 questions
dances
dances
dances

V. Drunk on Rain

the sky cracks open
a blank tempestual egg
spilling its fluids to the ravenous earth
he dances
for no reason
the rain cakes his flesh
sucking the dryness from him
he laughs
for no reason
the rain spills across him
wrapping him in wetness
he cries
for no reason
the rain slackens
and leaves him lying
in his intoxication
and at once
the clouds suck themselves back in

VI. Dry

he dances boldly
continuously trying
to draw down the rain

On Reading Bleak House

I was a Jarndyce.
I waited for the settlement—
Of my head, of my stomach,
Suffering *Estheria nervosa*,
And wishing Tom's All Alone was a local bar—
And I would have hovered there
Like a crook at a corner table,
One finger on the page,
One hand on a mug of fog,
Sipping potent droughts of miasma
And doing shots of satire
And spontaneous combustion,
And munching Jellybys—I mean jellybeans—
Or puffing on smallweed if no cops haunted—
And all the while knowing that moving on
Meant reading ten more chapters for Monday,
And my mind like a fish globe
Congested with guppies—

Justine Courtney Reilly

DREAMS OF THE DEAD

Lynnette Jackets

Cynthia glanced around the unfamiliar landscape. The floor was black and stretched to the horizon in all directions. The sky was a uniform storm cloud grey. She glanced down at her blue jeans and T-shirt. *At least I'm dressed.*

"Just add a couple of melting clocks, and this place could be a work of art." She stepped forward but nothing changed. "I remember falling asleep, so this must be a dream."

Funny, most of my dreams have a cast from movies and television shows I get a chance to watch.

"Maybe the good stuff will come later." She answered the inner critic aloud.

"It seems so real."

Cynthia turned around. The new speaker was a young man, younger than she was, in baggy pants and an equally baggy shirt with a bewildered expression on his pale, unshaven face. He hadn't been there before and she had never seen him in her life.

"Who are you?"

"Allan Richards. And this is the weirdest dream I've ever had. What's that?" He pointed to something behind her.

Cynthia turned around again. *If I keep this up, I'm going to get dizzy really quick.* An object had appeared as quietly as Allan Richards had. It was a large black trapezoid that seemed to rise seamlessly from the black floor. A tall, black, and broken pillar—like one from a Greek temple—sat on top of the trapezoid. "That's new."

"Are you the spirit guide?" Cynthia and Allan turned to the new speaker, a woman a few years older than Cynthia who looked overjoyed about sharing a dream with two strangers. "I didn't expect to progress here so quickly. Do you have a dream quest for me?"

"My name is Cynthia Towers and last I checked I was still a **living** private investigator."

"Don't look at me," Allan stepped back. "I just started college."

"You don't have to be dead to be a spirit guide. You could be the human personification of an elemental or an animal spirit. Like Coyote."

Cynthia glanced at Allan. He looked as confused as she felt. *No help from him.* "Does this dream come with a translator?"

"Coyote was/is the trickster god worshipped by many Southwestern Native American tribes." A dark-haired man stepped forward, adjusting his glasses. "Professor Jake Hollings."

"Me, an academic, a kid, and a flake. Who else is going to show up in this dream?"

"Randolph Carter?" Allan shrugged when all his suggestion earned was confusion from the others.

"A lot more people than what you named are here," the flake murmured loud enough for everyone to hear. The group had expanded to roughly a dozen people. "I thought dreamscaping was a personal, intimate event?"

"Depends on who's controlling the dreamscaping," Jake answered. "Maybe the monument is a clue." He stepped closer and Cynthia walked with him. The year 1938 was carved just under the pillar, followed by thirteen names.

Cynthia frowned, "1938 doesn't mean anything to me."

Jake peered intently at the list of names, then straightened suddenly. "That's my grandfather!"

"What?"

"There!" He pointed to the list without touching the monument. "Jeff Hollings, my grandfather!"

His cry brought the rest of the group surging forward like hungry cattle adding their cries of recognition to the louder din.

"Hold it!" Cynthia shouted repeatedly until the crowd quieted. "Let's try to understand this one name at a time." The crowd remained quiet. "Okay. Logan Blake?"

"That's my grandfather." A middle-aged man used a half wave to indicate himself.

"And you are?" Cynthia prompted.

"Donald Blake," he answered apologetically.

"Thomas Devero?"

"That's my grandfather. Regina Devero-Harper."

So the flake has a name. "Walter Edwards?"

"He was my grandfather. I'm Paul Edwards."

"Ryan Evans?"

"My grandfather," a terse British-accented voice answered.
"Catherine Evans."

"Robert Green?"

"Mine. Ben Green."

"Jeff Hollings?"

"My grandfather; I'm Jake Hollings."

"Aaron Hunter?"

"My mother's father. Karen Duncan."

"Donald Jackson?"

"My grandfather. Daniel Jackson."

"Ian McPherson?"

"My grandfather. Sara McPherson."

"I know you," Jake looked surprised. "You clean my building."

Cynthia glared and Jake fell silent. "Henry Payne?"

"My grandfather. I'm Grant Payne."

"Matthew Richards?"

"My grandfather. Allan Richards."

"Carlos Roslina?"

"My grandfather; Elizabeth Roslina."

"And Charles Towers, who must be my grandfather.
Cynthia Towers."

"Don't you know for sure?" Regina asked.

"I don't even know who my parents are. Now we need to know what the connection is between our grandfathers and 1938."

The shrill siren of the alarm clock looped a lasso around Cynthia's hearing and yanked her awake. She lurched to sitting up in her bed, turning off the awful racket. Zy, her German Shepherd, lifted her head and whined. "Yeah, yeah. I'm coming." She slid out of bed and into her jeans before she realized that her dog was lying next to the bedroom door. Zy usually slept on her bed next to her feet. "Is something wrong, girl?"

Zy jumped to her feet with a bark and licked Cynthia's

outstretched hand.

Cynthia entered another figure into the much-abused cashbook. "Well, as long as nothing unexpected happens—like having to buy more ammo because the last box disappeared—I can feed me and Zy for the rest of the month." She turned dog-eared, heavy with White-Out pages. "More withdrawals than deposits lately. Face it, girlfriend. You need a client."

The last word reverberated in the cavernous office space, converted from a tiny store. The front windows were discretely hidden behind cheap, off-white venetian blinds that no one else needed in that size. Two desks were present; the one only holding a second-hand word processor was pushed to the front of the room to serve as a receptionist's desk. Cynthia let the vision of a highly competent Miss Lemon typing at the word processor make her smile. *But first you have to have some money to pay Miss Lemon a salary.* That thought made her look down at the cashbook again.

"You'd think with all the damn lawyers in town, one of them would need a detective on stand-by." She snapped the stained and torn cover shut and banished the book to a desk drawer.

As if that would solve your troubles.

"Perry Mason always had work for Paul Drake to do. And I wouldn't complain nearly as much."

She brushed her shaggy brown bangs out of her eyes as she slumped in her chair. "You have no one to blame your troubles on but yourself. Or your stubborn independence streak." Her brown eyes focused on one of her few concessions to decorating—her framed movie poster of *Ordeal by Innocence* hanging on the wall of the so-called waiting room. "You could have stayed with Decker's Agency. Or the force. But no, you had to prove that you could make it with no help from anyone."

But wasn't that the Dream? The only Dream? To make something out of yourself that people would respect? To be able to introduce yourself as Cynthia Towers and expect people to recognize the name?

"With all the press cops get, I should have stayed on the force. That at least promised some notoriety."

That's not the Dream.

The door of her office opened with a jangle of bells. Cynthia winced, but the noise was the best way to make sure she didn't talk to herself in front of a prospective client. She stood up at her desk, and hoped the mysterious figure entering would have enough sense to come straight to the inner office. *Inner office, that's a joke. A desk and a couple of amateurly reupholstered chairs from Goodwill separated from the larger room by a waist-high partition masquerading as a wall.*

Yeah, well, Sherlock Holmes worked out of his living room. Cynthia opened her mouth to start the standard greeting, but no sound escaped.

The woman faced her—the *flake from that dream!*—and grinned. "I finally found you! I called all the Towers in the phone book but your home number isn't listed. Then I remembered you said you were a private investigator, so I looked them up and found you! We're the only two in Albany. From the dreamscape."

"Great, now what are you going to do?"

"I want to hire you." Regina Devero-Harper sat down in the client chair ignoring its cheapness. "I want you to find everybody else from the dreamscaping, so we're not limited to just dream time. And we still hadn't figured out what's so important about 1938 when I woke up, so I guess you need to work on that too."

She wants me to do what? Regardless that I haven't got that crazy dream out of my head all morning, she wants me to do what? "Why?"

Regina blinked with an expression of not having anticipated that question. "We were summoned. We are needed to do something and we can't do that unless we know what to do." She opened her purse, a large, crumpled, well-filled woven wicker bag with a long strap wrapped around her shoulder. *That's an accessory that clashes.* She was wearing a long-sleeved, aqua knit pantsuit with a printed top underneath the jacket. She set the garage-sale reject on her lap and started pawing in it. *If she starts*

pulling out candles, Tarot cards, or a Ouija board; I'm out here. I don't care if it is my office. "I've watched Simon & Simon. How much of a retainer do you need?"

How crazy is this lady?

At least she didn't pull out a Ouija board.

You could probably make a million bucks off her and she'd never know!

That's unethical and you know it!

She's an easy mark. Any con man with half a brain could see that.

But I'm not a con man. "Okay, since we seem to be sharing the same crazy dream, I'll cut you a deal. \$500 for a retainer, and I'll charge you \$150 a day and expenses. I'll keep receipts and I'll keep you updated with written reports. That's half my usual rates."

She finally pulled her hands out of the bag with a plastic card. "Do you take MasterCard?"

Cynthia quickly dispensed with the financial and clerical matters. "Thirteen people were in that dream. Did anybody else show up after I woke up?"

Regina shook her head. "No, I made a list of everyone I remember and what I remember them telling me about themselves. Let me find it." She dived into the purse again.

She could hide a bomb in that bag. I can't believe she made a list. Maybe she's only half the flake I thought she was.

"Here it is!" Regina pulled it out triumphantly and slammed it down on Cynthia's desk. "And I gotta go. Let me now how it goes." She slung the purse behind her back as she stood and bounced to the door. "I'm sure we'll figure everything out. We must be capable, why else would we be chosen?"

Maybe because we're our grandfathers' descendants and they were the capable ones? Cynthia picked up the sheet of paper, only slightly crumpled from its stay in Regina Devero-Harper's purse. She had listed six names with notes beside them—Cynthia and Regina included. She must have wanted to make sure she wouldn't be forgotten by anyone, including herself. Cynthia added what names she could remember that Regina had forgotten,

but the total still wasn't thirteen.

Sometimes listening to the radio helped. She turned the clock radio to a New York station. "In financial news, the CEO of Western Dune, Grant Payne has reportedly committed suicide this morning. Details are still forthcoming and NYPD is investigating. One thing is certain: Mr. Payne will be missed in the financial community of New York—if not the country."

Cynthia looked back down at the list as the radio started playing someone's request. She had that gut-clenching feeling that something, something big was going on. *Grant Payne, Western Dune* was written on line six. "The dream wasn't bad enough to cause someone to commit suicide."

Unless he knew something the rest of us don't.

The only other comment on the list that was useful was next to Catherine Evans. "Little Gidding, England. Sounds like a town."

The phone call took half-an-hour. "What a bill, what a bill, what a bill I don't have to pay," Cynthia muttered into the receiver while she waited.

"'Ello? Who's this?" The voice from Little Gidding was female, possibly middle age. *It's so hard to judge on the phone.*

"Hi, this Cynthia Towers. I'm trying to reach Catherine Evans."

"She's dead. 'Orrible accident. 'Er gas 'eater started a leaking. She never woke up."

"She's dead?"

"That's what I said. Listen, you're the second Yank to be calling for Catherine. Why she's so popular?"

"I don't know. I'm just a secretary. Thanks for your help."

"I was beginning to wonder if anyone was going to show." Jake Hollings was sitting in front of the monument Indian-style, his hands resting palms down on his slack-covered thighs. He glanced briefly at Cynthia and turned back to the monument.

"I had trouble falling asleep." Cynthia stood next to him and stared at the monument. "Regina hired me to find everyone else."

"The woman who thought you were Coyote?"

"Yes. She had an accident at her house. Fell down the basement stairs."

"So did Allan Richards. Only it was stairs in a building at Boston College. Right after talking to me. I didn't even know he was one of my students until now."

"I found out just a few hours ago. She's in critical condition at the hospital."

"Allan wasn't so lucky. Neither was Sara McPherson. She inhaled too much of the wrong cleaning chemical and no one found her until it was too late."

"Grant Payne and Catherine Evans are dead too."

"I knew about Catherine. I managed to call her." Jake rubbed the back of his neck with his left hand, trying to massage the taunt muscles she could see rising from his starched collar.

"Just another accident. Too many damn accidents."

"Grant Payne was a suicide." Cynthia informed him.

"Oh wonderful, someone or something is getting creative."

"What do you mean *something*?"

He looked up at her as he slowly stood up. "How much do you know about the occult?"

"Does *X-Files* count?"

He sighed and shook his head. "Hollywood's version. That show's more accurate than some, but I don't think they've covered this."

"Look at the monument." Elizabeth Roslina stepped closer to it. "There are only five names left!"

"This monument is the key to everything." Cynthia strode toward it, reached out, and touched the etched surface, her fingers brushing against *Charles Towers*.

She was looking at a room with dark paneled walls and built-in bookcases. On the floor was a blue marble ring ten feet in diameter that marked off a white circle sectioned into six equal pieces and fitted together with heavy black lines. Strange symbols were inlaid with red marble into the blue ring. This all was set into the white marble floor. A group of robed figures, Cynthia couldn't tell if they were male or female, surrounded the circle chanting.

She looked up at the bookshelf. A yearbook was eye-level.
Miskatonic University 1938 - 1939.

She jerked back, gasping for breath. The four other people present stared at her. "Touch it," she gasped. They hesitated. "Go ahead, touch it!"

Jake reached out and touched his grandfather's name. He jerked back, "Miskatonic!" He gulped down air. "My grandfather taught there."

The other three touched the monument and jerked back. "We all saw the same thing?" Donald Blake asked.

"A room with a strange circle on the floor and a bunch of creepy monks?" Everyone nodded at Cynthia's question. "Where's Miskatonic University?"

"Arkham, Massachusetts. My grandfather taught there." Jake straightened and stood up from where he collapsed. "We need to go there. I'm in Boston, so it's not far for me."

"I'll fly in on the first plane," Paul Edwards said. "I'm in Florida."

"Arkham has a small airport," Elizabeth commented. "I've been there buying antiques. I think we should all meet at the Holiday Inn there. It's a nice motel."

"Sounds good to me." The alarm blared and Cynthia sat up in bed. "This has gotta stop soon. I haven't felt this bad since the last time I pulled a stakeout."

Zy raised her head and whined at the door of the bedroom. "Come on, girl. Road trip."

The Holiday Inn of Arkham was located on the outskirts of the quiet, historic town built where they had conceded to have interstate access. No one else from the group had checked in yet, so Cynthia got directions to the university and drove to its library.

A pimply-scarred boy who looked fresh out of high school sat at the circulation desk reading a comic book. "Excuse me, where are the yearbooks?"

"Huh?" He looked up quickly and blankly.

If this is the state of today's education, maybe I'm better off just sticking with high school. "Gee, I hate to pull you away

from the Adventures of Wolverine, but I need assistance. Where are the University's yearbooks? You do know what a yearbook is?"

"Yeah. They're on the third floor."

"Thanks." Cynthia turned and walked to the elevators.

He finally saw the German Shepherd as she and her owner stepped into the elevator. "Hey! You can't bring that dog in here!"

"Come stop me," she invited with a wicked grin.

The shelves, ill lit and narrow, had last been dusted in 1898. Cynthia sneezed as her finger along the spines of the books, leaving a line of original cover color. "Zy, you had the right idea, not coming down here." Zy barked quietly in response. "Geez, who cleans in here?"

Someone who's got more sense than you not to come here.

"It's a paying job, isn't it?"

You conned that woman into thinking she was getting a deal when you charged her regular rates.

"And she used her husband's credit card. Here's the 1930s." 1930 - 1931, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938 - 1939; she eagerly snatched it off the shelf.

She sat at a table with the book and opened the yearbook to the index. Zy laid down at her feet as she pulled out a scratch piece of paper. The first name she looked up was *Charles Towers*. He was listed, and she jotted down the page numbers. The same thing was done for Edwards, Hollings, Roslina, and Blake.

They all had one page number in common. It was a group picture of fourteen men—the Society for the Study of Religions and Philosophies. "Not exactly a snappy title. What were you really up to?"

She quickly found a copying machine and copied the picture, after finding out the machine used a debit card instead of taking money directly, finding the machine that sold the cards, and buying a card. The copying finally accomplished; Cynthia went to the pay phone in the library lobby and called the Holiday Inn.

"Have there been any messages for Cynthia Towers?"

"Yes, Ma'am. Jake Hollings called. He said he was at the

local hospital."

Damn. "Thank you." She turned to the same boy staffing the circulation desk. "Where's the local hospital?"

"Huh?"

"Hospital. Must go. Where is it?"

"On the other side of town. Just follow the main road through."

"Thanks." Cynthia took a stronger grip on Zy's leash and strode out the door.

"You can't bring your dog in there, either!"

He was thinner in person. Cynthia stared into the hospital's waiting room. Professor Jake Hollings slumped in a chair in the people-deficient room; completely oblivious to the sunlit garden framed by the floor-to-ceiling window or the piped-in comfort music. He looked up as she approached. The lenses in his glasses magnified the relief in his brown eyes.

"Cynthia Towers, I presume?"

"Nice to finally meet you." She shook his hand and sat next to him. "What happened?"

"Elizabeth Roslina and I drove up together. We parked the car and crossed the street to go into a restaurant. I crossed, but Elizabeth" Jake took a deep breath. "The police said it was an accident. No one saw the driver, so they concluded that some kid freaked out and ran. I wish they knew how sick of accidents I am."

"And Elizabeth?"

"Dead. She never had a chance."

"Then it's probably a safe bet that Blake and Edwards won't be showing up."

"Could you be a little more callous?"

Cynthia frowned. *Great, a bleeding heart. What have I done to deserve this?* "I have a job to do."

Have some compassion; he has had a shock. Not everyone gets police desensitization. She continued, "And if we don't finish this, all these murders will go unpunished."

Murders? Do I really think they've been murdered? Boy,

look at his eyes get big; I hit him with that one. Yeah, they were murdered. Regina the flake was right. We were summoned to do something and someone is using these accidents to get rid of us. Someone or something. Great, now you're starting to talk like you're in a horror movie.

Jake stood up. He was only half a foot shorter than Cynthia. *At least I don't tower over him.* "Okay, where do we begin?"

"For starters, let's get out of this hospital. It's giving me the creeps." They walked side-by-side through the sterile, pastel-tinted hall and passed through the automatic glass doors to the healthier, brighter world without a word.

Zy jumped up and barked, annoyed with having been left outside. "Hello, girl. I hope you didn't bite too many interns." Cynthia untied the leash from around a support column for the roof over the door.

"Nice dog," Jake extended a hand towards Zy's head. Zy growled.

"My dog isn't nice. Zy, he's a friend. No bite. Extend your hand."

"We're at a hospital, why not?" Jake held it out, biting his lip. Zy sniffed it disdainfully, yelped, and ran into the parking lot dragging her leash. "Where is it going?"

"To the car. Don't worry about it. What do you think about this?" Cynthia pulled the photocopied picture out of the back pocket of her faded blue jeans and handed it to him.

"That's my grandfather. He looks so young. The Society for the Study of Religions and Philosophies. No wonder he had such an extensive library." He peered closer at the caption as Cynthia led the way to her car. "Wait a minute, this is a picture of **all** our grandfathers. From 1938, right?"

"Right." Zy had already opened the one of the doors to the backseat and sat inside, waiting for it to be shut. Cynthia slammed it closed, giving the dog the whole back of the Taurus station wagon to enjoy. "All their grandkids showed up in the first dream. All except one guy's, the Vice-President of the club."

"Dr. Miles Clement, Ph.D."

"Right. And if he's still alive, he can tell us what's going on. Hopefully. So we need to find a phone book."

"No." The sunlight flashed off his glasses as he shook his head while he sat down in the car. "We need to find Miskatonic's Alumni Center. If he used to teach here and still lives in Arkham, they can tell us where. Trust me."

At the Alumni Center, Jake acquired Dr. Miles Clement's address while Cynthia picked up a map of the campus. Miles lived in a vaguely Victorian two-story house across the street from the heart of the campus.

The old man who opened the door had thinning white hair and blue eyes sparkling from a collection of wrinkles. "Yes?"

"Dr. Clement?" Jake began hesitantly. Cynthia didn't try to help. *They're both academics; let them figure it out.*

"Retired. Can I help you?"

"I believe you knew my grandfather. My name is Jake Hollings."

The transformation over Miles's face was shocking. The pink color drained away, leaving pale wrinkles and ashen grey lips. He shuffled out of the doorway, shutting the door behind him. He sank into a wooden rocking chair set close to the door on the front porch. "Good God in heaven, it's starting again."

"What's starting again?" Cynthia asked quietly.

Miles looked up, horrified. "You're getting your wife involved?"

Jake blushed, and the flush spread from his cheeks down his neck. "I'm not his wife. My name is Cynthia Towers."

He nodded, "Charles's granddaughter."

"I guess. All I know about my parents is that they were married and they are dead." *Watch the bitterness level!*

Miles blinked. "Charles died when his boy was a young man and his wife followed him not long after. Sounds like your parents followed them."

"A car accident when I was two, waiting at the babysitter's, if you must know. But we didn't come to talk about my lack of parental care. We came to talk about a really weird

dream and what happened to our grandfathers in 1938."

Miles leaned back. "What happened in 1938. Some strange type of cult tried to bring something into our world. Something that doesn't belong here. We all had dreams, strange dreams warning us of their plans. And our group stopped the ritual before they finished."

"The Society for the Study of Religions and Philosophies," Jake said.

Miles shrugged, "We had to call ourselves something. We never figured out what they had allied themselves with. Armitage probably could have told us but he died the summer before. We stopped the ritual, but the leader promised that it would be back in sixty years. Now the sixty years are up." He peered up at them. "There should be more of you. There were fourteen of us."

"The others are dead or incapacitated." Cynthia pulled her shoulder-length brown hair off her shoulders and into a ponytail holder she had found in a pocket. "The world's depending on me and him."

"Don't be flippant," Jake countered. "How did you stop the ritual?"

"My middle name is Flippant. Actually, it's Nicole." Jake glared. "Okay, I'll behave."

"We kept them from completing their incantation. I wanted to break the circle but Jeff didn't know if that would prevent the . . . thing from coming to Earth or if that would just get it here faster." Miles took a deep breath. "But I got rid of it."

Jake frowned. "This circle, was it a blue ring with red symbols inside the ring with the white circle inside the ring divided into six equal parts all laid out in marble?"

Miles paled again. "You've seen it?" He gasped.

"Only in a dream."

"You said you got rid of it," Cynthia reminded Miles quickly. *Jake is going to kill him with these sudden shocks.*

"What did you do?"

"See that square building behind the one in front of us?" He pointed across the street. Two red brick floors of the building were visible against the faintly pinkish sky. "It's built on the site

of the old Gotham Hall. That's where we found that circle, laid in the floor just as innocent as you please. I burnt it down."

"You what?" Jake declared, the glasses making his eyes three times larger than he could physically open them.

"I burnt old Gotham Hall down. You learn to do what has to be done to save the world. I never found that cursed piece of marble and the remnants of the cult didn't put it in any of the floors of the Monstrosity."

"The Monstrosity?" Cynthia smiled slightly at the old man's repulsion.

Miles pointed across the street again. "That's what it's called. The only ugly building on campus. Every other new building was built to match the historic architecture of the original buildings. But when I burnt down old Gotham Hall, that was the modern style of buildings on college campuses across the country. The crazy president of the university decided we needed to update the look of Miskatonic's campus and the Monstrosity was built." He paused, "Funny, he didn't last too long. But they didn't put the circle in there. I checked."

"So someone wants to bring this . . . thing to Earth. And they need the circle to do it and it's gone." Jake pulled his glasses off and polished them with the edge of his shirt pulled from his pants for the job.

"Could they make a new one?" Cynthia suggested.

"I guess they could. But most cults like to use an altar that has been sanctified by their deity."

Miles chuckled. "You sound just like Jeff."

Jake smiled shyly. "It was his library that got me interested in the occult. That's what I teach at Boston College."

Cynthia's stomach growled. "Um, guys, if you want to reminisce, that's fine with me. But I need to eat."

"Eat?" Jake put his glasses on and glanced at his watch. "I haven't eaten since breakfast."

"Correction, we both need to eat. Thanks for your help, Dr. Clement."

"Any time. Come back later if you want to know more about your grandfathers."

Cynthia pulled the university map out of her pocket as she sat on the squeaky booth seat. *Jake's lost in another world.* She glanced across the table at the man who absently chewed on a French fry and stared out into space. *But at least he's remembering to eat. And Zy's fed.* She looked out the window at the dog happily thrusting her head into her food bowl. *So I get to research.* She took a bite of her hamburger, looked down at the numbered aerial picture, and choked.

The sound returned Jake to the present. "Are you all right?"

She thrust the picture in his face as she gulped down her soft drink. "Do you see what I see? What surrounds new Gotham Hall?"

He took hold of the map picture and located new Gotham Hall, labeled #81. "Apollo's lyre! It's a pentagram!"

"The circle has to be there!"

Jake frowned, "But Miles checked the building and didn't find it."

"He must have missed it. Let's go ask him."

"Pentagrams are used in white magic too."

"If you really believe that's being used for white magic, you can wait here for me." *Eat, Cynthia!* She grabbed her hamburger and started out the door.

No one answered the knocks. "I don't like this," Jake muttered as Cynthia placed her hand on the doorknob.

"It's not breaking, just entering." She opened the door carefully. "Zy, keep watch." The dog froze on her haunches as she sat on Dr. Clement's porch, staring at the street.

Jake followed her into the brightly-lit living room. "Well-trained dog."

"Police dogs tend to be that."

Miles Clement was a neat man. The four bookshelves in the living room were well dusted and filled with books. A radio and a book sat on an end table next to a recliner that was raised to help someone stand. He also had an electric lift chair installed on

his staircase. *I thought people stopped using those after Gremlins.* It was stationed at the bottom of the stairs, but a light shone from a door in the hallway at the top.

"Dr. Clement?" Jake called quietly. He turned and saw Cynthia halfway up the stairs. "What are you doing?"

"You learn quickly to do what has to be done to save the world. Stay put and don't touch anything." Cynthia didn't touch the banister or the walls as she reached the top of the stairs.

The light spilled into the hall and cut the floor as sharply as a butcher knife. It fell from a bedroom; she could see a dresser from the partially open door. She pushed it open with her long-sleeved covered elbow.

Miles Clement's Kleenex-white face gaped at the ceiling. His shirt had been yanked open—exposing his chest to the unforgiving harshness of the overhead light. His chest had been penetrated, hacked apart by brute strength. A rib pointed to the ceiling. Blood dripped through the mattress to the floor under the bed. Strips of flesh and muscle hung of the side of the bed as limply as the sheet did.

Cynthia shut her eyes and stepped back until the wall stopped her. "Oh God, oh God, oh God."

"Cynthia? Cynthia, what's wrong?" Jake looked up the stairs.

I can't let him see. If I can't handle it, he sure can't.
"We're leaving now." She ran down the stairs.

"Why? What's wrong?" Jake brushed his black hair off his face as she grabbed his arm and pulled him through the living room.

"Trust me." Cynthia took a deep breath of night air. Her lungs expanded with pain as the cool night air collided with her warm insides. "We have to go. Now." She shut the door of the house. "Come, Zy." The dog scrambled to Cynthia's side as they walked down the short sidewalk to the car.

Jake didn't say anything until they were both inside it.
"What's going on?"

"Dr. Clement's dead."

"Dead? We have to help him! Call an ambulance or

something. Why are you driving away?"

"Believe me, he's beyond anyone's help. Except maybe a mortician's. Now if the police ask us about tonight, we went to see him, went inside because the door was unlocked, and left when he didn't answer."

"The police? What do the police have to do with anything?" Comprehension dawned on his face like the sun. "He was murdered! We have to go back. We have to report it." Cynthia kept driving. "You can't ignore this! We have to go to the police!" Jake's voice grew taunt with worry and a tinge of fear.

Cynthia pulled the car into a street leading into Miskatonic's campus and parked in an empty parking lot. She twisted in her seat to face him. "He was murdered, Jake. And what better way to get us out of the way than by getting us involved in a murder investigation? It was a desperate move, which means we're close. The ritual must be tonight and we're the only one who can stop it. I can't do this alone, Jake."

Jake's face was flushed. "If you have all the answers, what do we do now?"

"We stop the ritual."

"Okay, but where?"

"The Monstrosity, new Gotham Hall."

"Dr. Clement checked it. If he went to all the trouble of burning down one building to get rid of that circle, do you really think he would overlook any place it could be in the Monstrosity?"

"What about the roof?"

"What?"

Half of Cynthia's mouth curled up. "It's square building, shaped like a short skyscraper, probably has a flat roof. Why not put it on the roof?" She maneuvered the car back onto the street, heading for the looming dark square blocking the starlight of the clear, black night.

She parked her station wagon in front of the building and let Zy out. "Do you really think they would be crazy enough to put that circle on a roof of a four-story building that is inside a pentagram laid out with sidewalks?"

"I think they don't have a choice. They have to put the circle there or the ritual doesn't work. Do you really think my assumption is wrong or are you just playing devil's advocate?" Cynthia pushed Jake out of the opened passenger's side door and reached into the glove compartment.

"I guess I'm not cut out to be an action hero." She stood up, loaded a clip into a handgun, thrust the gun into its holster behind her back, and slammed the door shut. "A gun?" Jake's jaw dropped. "Are you crazy?"

"They're trying to summon a demon or something and I'm crazy for bringing a gun. You're right; you're not the action-hero type."

They ran up the dingy white concrete steps that reflected the dull orange light of the street lamps and through the inky shadow of the porch and past the metal-trimmed glass doors. Zy stepped back and whined. Cynthia dropped to her knee and scratched behind the dog's perked ears. "Go find them, Zy." The dog whined. "Please, girl. Find them." Zy barked and scrambled across the commercial tile floor, toenails eerily clacking against it. She disappeared into an open doorway across the hallway and they could hear her scrambling up a flight of stairs. "Come on," Cynthia urged, pulling her gun out and cocking it.

Zy led them up a flight of orange-lit stairs, past a fire extinguisher and ax, to a door flush with the landing. Cynthia quietly turned the unlocked doorknob and revealed a set of stairs leading to a rectangle of starry sky and brick wall. Zy sat down on the landing. *She's not moving. Can't blame her. I don't want to go up there either.* She gripped her gun tighter and inched forward. Jake swallowed loud enough for her to hear but followed.

The roof had two levels. The brick-covered second, third, and fourth floors reached up, enclosing the exposed roof of the first floor like a lidless box. Windows reflected the glow from the safety lights mounted on the building itself. The shingles and gravel crunched under foot as Jake and Cynthia emerged from the dark doorway. The robed figures were congregated between the door and a spot near the center of the roof. "Stop!" Cynthia

ordered, brandishing her gun.

They moved aside so she and Jake could see the singed marble surface set on the roof and the small pile of shingles that had been used to conceal it. "You're too late! Our Master comes! He comes!"

Cynthia risked a glance away from the group to the circle. It—the air, the view of the wall behind the circle—rippled. A dark shadow pressed against the ripple. "This is not happening. This is not happening." The shadow's shape gained definition becoming a head resembling a dragon's with a snout as long as she was tall. *What will the rest of it look like? "Oh God!"*

"God is dead and gone! The new world will start here, tonight!" The group lifted their hands in rapture as their hooded faces followed their master's progress.

We have to stop this thing! But I don't know how? And Jake doesn't know how.

Break the circle!

But what if that doesn't stop it?

Either it eats you or you take it out with you.

Reichenbach Falls, Cynthia. This is your Reichenbach Falls.

"Jake!" Jake was gaping at the shadow. "Jake!"

He turned from it. "I don't know how to stop it. I don't even know what it is!"

"I have an idea." She pressed the gun into his hands and aimed it at the group. They turned to watch her with an eerie synchronization. Their arms fell to their sides, and the sleeves slid back down to their wrists. The wind began to swoop into the box, transforming Cynthia's ponytail into a stinging whip. She moved her head away from Jake to keep it out of his face. "If any of them move, shoot them." She ran down the stairs before he could protest.

The wind pressed against her, pushing her faster down the stairs. She jumped, skipping the last few steps. Zy laid on the floor, whining and covering her head with her front paws. *I don't have any time to comfort her. And I seriously doubt it would do any good.* The fire ax was still mounted next to the fire extinguisher.

She returned to the roof with the ax propped on her shoulder like she was diminutive lumberjack. She strode to the circle. A gunshot reverberated off the boxy walls of the building. "I shot him!" Jake's scream reached over the wind. "I shot him!"

I can't deal with two things at once! Pull yourself together, Jake! And stay that way!

Cynthia lifted the ax over her head. The group of robed figures let out a howl of despair that would put any Greek chorus to shame. She heaved the ax into the blue ring of the slightly charred marble circle.

The shadow shape materializing in the center vanished with a howl that shrank the one its disciples had made to a baby's wail. The ax began vibrating but Cynthia clung to it. The vibrations began traveling up her arms, making her feel like she was in an over-amplified rock concert of discordant tone. "Jake!" She wrenched her right hand off the ax handle and grabbed his arm.

The wind began to swirl, condensing into a whirlwind narrowing to the circle. Cynthia screwed her eyes shut and kept a tight hold of the ax and Jake. *We are going to die.* Screams began littering the wind, making a song that churned her stomach. *What did I do? Holmes was a fictional character; he could come back from the dead. I can't!* The whirlwind spun tighter and tighter, and Cynthia could feel it move past her, focusing on the circle.

The marble shattered and coated them and the roof in a fine, gritty dust. Cynthia opened her eyes in amazement. The robed figures were gone, the marble circle was gone, Jake was trying to look out of his dust-covered lenses. "We're alive!" She released her cramping hands and enveloped him in a bear hug. "We're alive! We're alive! We're alive!" She spun him around with a squeal.

He staggered back trying to regain his balance. "We better be after that." He took off his glasses to clean them, looked down, realized his shirt was just as dirty, and stuffed them in the pocket of his slacks. He rolled up the sleeve on his left arm. "You left a bruise. Not that I'm ungrateful, but why did you grab

hold of me like that?"

Cynthia picked her gun off the roof where he had dropped it when she hugged him and holstered it. "Do you want the truth or something that will give you peace of mind?"

"The truth."

She started down the stairs. "If I was going with that thing, I wasn't going alone."

THE BOYFRIEND DIARIES

i.

sexy & sexsmells
& sex & Sexton
cum on belly
tongue-in-ass
humor
in the midnight hour
book boy
novel boy
write my name
in that final chapter
read me to sleep
with that
too-cute-for-comfort
smile
invade me &
take pity on banality
sleep baby
rock-a-bye
dream of a meal you can finish
satisfy hunger
Frito-pie
of my eye
you drive me crazy
when you feast on me
big & bold
red & black

venom-lack
crawl on
with that menthol kiss
that has made
angels wet themselves
you are raw &
I like that
I envy that.

ii.
mama's boy
ricocheting
my diamond of Yesterday's
pull on up
spin in that Devil rhythm
forget the lights
& the sounds
drink your juice &
fade away into my arms
Mr. Lanky
Mr. Lean
Mr. Got-to-have-my-caffeine
cemetery daddy
with your fishnets on
I often wonder who spun you from straw.

(LARK REMEDIES)

Poetry

Somehow I guess I hope
to kill off all my bad feelings
all my sadness, my hurt
by writing it down here on paper.
When I bleed out my sorrows
in thick black ink
onto this clean white page,
I feel I have contained it
outside of myself,
captured it in a cage so
it can no longer cause me grief.
Then, if ever I am tired
even of just reading about it,
I can tear it up
or crumple it into a wad
and throw it across the room.
I can physically destroy
my anger, grief, and sorrow.
I can dispose of my
loneliness, hurt, and depression
in the nearest trash can.
And then, perhaps, when its gone,
I can write down my joys, my hopes,
my loves – not to dispose of them,
but to cherish them.

Kelly Kathleen



Self
Amy Haney

Elizabeth's Oak
A Sequel of
or An Explanation to
The Bloody Hand
Lynnette Jackets

Rhiannon tried to remember when she had first seen the expression in Phobos Byrd's eyes. The young woman stared at the door behind Rhiannon. Her brown eyes were opened wide and never blinked, but the rest of her face was relaxed, impassive. It reminded her of the first patient suffering from paranoia that she had treated. Phobos's expression was similar to his—right before he would start screaming that the FBI was coming. Why on earth did Paul want her to see this patient?

Still, there was something about her—almost like she had an untapped, inner source of strength. Was she Gifted? *Please don't backfire.* Rhiannon took a deep breath and pushed. Phobos flinched and jerked her head to glance at the corners of the room. "He's not here."

"Who's not here?" Rhiannon asked gently.

Phobos looked at her face, noticing the woman sitting across the table for the first time. Her eyes were narrowed.

"You're not Dr. Gilman."

"No, I'm Dr. Rhiannon Cathmor. Dr. Gilman wanted us to talk."

"Why should we talk? You don't know anything about me." Phobos clenched her fists.

"You can tell me about yourself. Why are you here?"

"Because the nurse brought me here. To talk to you I guess." Phobos sat back in her chair and blinked her eyes.

Cute, she's sane enough to be sarcastic. "I meant why are you in this hospital."

She pulled her knees to her chest, wrapped her arms around her legs, and rested her chin on her knees. "Because I'm dangerous. They say I'm crazy but I'm not. I summon things that I shouldn't. Elizabeth showed me that. I have to stay here so everyone else is safe."

Rhiannon pushed the notebook on the table aside with her elbow as she set her forearms on the table and leaned on them.

"What do you mean, *you summon things that you shouldn't?*"

Phobos uncurled and leaned forward. "They say I'm not responsible. That it's not my fault that Maggie's dead." Her hands formed fists again. "But it was her blood and I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't save her. I probably can't save myself. So I'm staying here."

"What will save you?"

"The truth."

And the truth will set you free? Rhiannon didn't comment on the Biblical quote. It was more important to learn what Phobos considered the truth. "You have to know who is right, you or them?"

Phobos looked down, her brown hair obscuring her face until she looked back up. Her brown eyes resembled thunderheads unable to rain. "I know they're right. I say a ghost killed my best friend, even though I know that's crazy. But I also know it's true. I'm staying here, Dr. Rhiannon Cathmor, where I can't hurt anyone by calling up ghosts to kill them or making them realize I'm crazy. Can I go back to my room now?"

"Yes, Phobos. Thank you for talking with me."

"You're welcome, Dr. Rhiannon Cathmor." Phobos walked around the table to stand by the door. Rhiannon turned to watch her. The lack of trust didn't offend the young woman. "But I wouldn't waste my time trying to help me. I would go help someone who has some hope." The attendant opened the door and Phobos followed her out.

Rhiannon sighed as she picked up her pen and scooted her notebook back in front of her. Phobos Byrd had been neatly written across the top of the page. Phobos was Gifted, untrained and probably very unaware that she was. But who was the mysterious he? She had mentioned him when Rhiannon had pushed. She noted it on the paper.

And who was Elizabeth? She said Elizabeth had shown her summoning was dangerous. She's also blaming herself for her best friend's death. That seemed to be the catalyst for her current

problems.

Guilt was understandable if she held herself accountable. And she also feared being the cause of someone else's death. It was also possible that everything she said was a fantasy she had created. But it's equally possible--because she was Gifted--that she was telling the truth.

She set down her pen. Why on earth had Paul asked her to see this patient? He had never agreed with any of her theories and had considered her studies in parapsychology a complete waste of time. It had been a relief when he had taken a job at Watson Memorial that moved him away from his ex-girlfriend and ended his crusade to make her a conventional psychiatrist.

And now he was back, asking for her opinion about one of his patients. An opinion he shouldn't be asking for and he wouldn't like. Rhiannon almost suspected a hoax, a let's-prove-how-gullible-Rhiannon-is trick. Except Paul didn't have that much imagination, and Phobos was convincing.

She closed her notebook as Paul Gilman walked into the session room. "What do you think of our resident ghost story?"

Act like a professional. This is not the time or place to let him annoy you. "How long has she been here?"

"Two years. Checked herself in six months after the murder of her best friend, Maggie Grolier. For some reason, she's suffering from the delusion that a ghost killed her." Paul shut the door and leaned against the wall next to it.

"She has spent two years under professional psychiatric care and hasn't changed her story? Maybe she isn't delusional."

"Oh come on. I know you believe in ghosts, ESP, and the Loch Ness monster--despite the scientific evidence--but don't expect me to." He was still good-looking with his brown hair carefully gelled in place and his brown eyes hidden behind a stylish pair of glasses. But she hated that contemptuous tone of voice. And in every conversation they had, he eventually used it.

"Don't start this fight again. Why did you call me to come look at her? To ridicule my unique perspective? If she hasn't changed her story in two years of constant therapy, maybe you're missing something. Possibly the obvious."

"If she hasn't changed her story in two years of constant therapy, it's because we haven't dealt with the cause of the delusion." Paul's lips pressed together, squeezing the pink away.

"And what is she suffering from that has left such a deep mental scar?" Rhiannon crossed her arms.

"Post-traumatic stress disorder. With a unique twist."

"Did she witness the murder?"

"No, she just found the body."

"Post-traumatic stress disorder from just finding the body?"

Paul's face relaxed with the sarcasm. "I understand it wasn't in great shape."

"I'm looking into this." Rhiannon stood up.

"You can't!"

"Why the hell did you ask me to come see her then?" She planted her feet on the floor and hands on her hips. "What do you want? My approval to write up this case and make your reputation on her suffering? You should know me better than that."

Paul closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I asked you to come see her because you were the one who was most vocal about breaking regulations if it was in the patient's best interest."

She blinked. "Did you just pay me a compliment?"

"You don't think less of me, do you? Phobos's condition is worsening. She's having nightmares, her paranoid expression is a recent development, and I'm afraid she'll get worse until she can be convinced that she isn't responsible for Maggie Grolier's death."

"She isn't responsible, right?"

"The police cleared her and her family of suspicion."

Could he be any more confusing? "Let me get this straight. You want me to investigate the ghost angle of Phobos's story?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why didn't you just ask me?"

"Because I know how picky you are. I figured a conversation with Phobos would interest you."

"Paul, it's extremely annoying to be manipulated." She

crossed her arms over her chest. "You know I would help you if you asked."

"I'm sorry."

He looked apologetic, which was usually a good indication that he meant what he had said. "All right, you got what you wanted. Did the police ever find the murderer?"

"No. If they would, it could help Phobos's recovery. She could let go of her delusion."

Rhiannon frowned. *So you want me to prove her statements about a ghost are delusional. You never change Paul.*

"A Detective Sanchez was part of the investigation. He calls the office at least once a week concerned about Phobos's progress. He cares more than her family does."

She sat down in her chair. Paul hadn't moved from his position on the wall. She moved the chair to face him. "Does her family keep any contact?"

"Some, not much." Paul pushed his glasses up his nose. "Look, I can tell you're not happy with the way I'm handling this."

"Sorry, I'll have to pull out my poker face."

"But we were making progress. And I'd like to return to it. Are you going to help me or not?"

She stood, "I'll help Phobos. If helping her helps you, profit from it."

"Thank you." He grasped the doorknob that turned futilely in his hand. He glanced up and banged his fist against the door, staring out the window that faced the hallway.

It was quickly opened and Paul stormed down the hall. Rhiannon shook her head. At least he said thank you. She scooped up her notebook and stepped out into the hall of the psychiatric hospital. Someone was waiting; she felt it. She turned and looked at the orderly who had opened the door. "I didn't expect to see you here."

Jake smirked as he leaned on his broom. "I don't know why you're surprised. Given how you have always accused me of enjoying the pain and suffering of others."

"Karma won't know where to put you. Life forms don't reach as low as you."

"Now that's petty, Rhiannon." His smirk vanished, leaving his face blank.

She folded her arms across her chest, hugging her notebook. "Did you think I'd forget the stunt you pulled in the graveyard?"

"That was when you were an undergrad. Whatever happened to forgive and forget?"

"Whatever happened to divine retribution?"

He grinned, his teeth appearing yellow against his dark lips. "There's some of that razor-sharp wit! Now Rhiannon, listen to me. Leave this alone. It's no concern of yours."

"Do you really think I'm going to leave this alone knowing you're here, Jake? You should know me better than that. What are you doing to that girl?"

"Still nosy," he tsked. "Always was your worst fault." Jake straightened and started pushing the broom down the hall.

* * *

Rhiannon's office was on the fifth floor in a short office building that was surrounded by bookstores and law offices. The waiting room was painted in a pale green with a dark hunter green fabric covering the chairs, floor, and windows. A large wood carving of a Celtic knot hung on the wall behind the receptionist's desk. A young man with light brown hair and a wispy hint of a goatee covering a pointy chin sat at the desk, happily clicking the computer's mouse. "Did I miss anything, Haydon?"

"Not a thing, sorry. How did it go?" He brushed his fingers against his goatee as he looked up. "If it's okay for me to ask." Rhiannon quickly related Paul's request and his method of asking. "He sounds like a jerk."

Rhiannon sighed, "He's a mundane."

"That's no excuse."

"True, but he really does want to help this girl." Rhiannon opened her inner office door and picked up her briefcase. "I need you to research this patient."

"Anything is better than minding the phone that never rings." Haydon watched her put the notebook she had carried into the office in her briefcase. "Her name is Phobos Byrd?"

"Yes, find out everything you can. Another name to look into is Maggie Grolier."

"The murder victim?" Haydon wrote the name down on a notepad on his desk.

"Yes. I'm going to talk to one of the detectives in charge of the case." She double-checked the position of everything in her briefcase and snapped it shut.

"Fine, I don't like cops. But what's the problem with the this-girl-is-nuts theory?"

"She's Gifted."

"Gifted?" Haydon echoed.

"Has power, Sight, is psychic, whatever you call it."

"Okay, I'm not that dense. So is Phobos Byrd crazy or did a ghost kill her best friend?"

"That's what we have to find out." Rhiannon crossed the outer office and moved into the hall, swinging her briefcase at her side.

* * *

"Detective Sanchez?" The large man turned in his chair. "I'm Dr. Cathmor."

He jumped to his feet at his desk and shook her offered hand. "Hello. Yes, I'm Detective Jose Sanchez. Are you the new doctor in charge of physicals?"

"I'm afraid not." Rhiannon smiled. The Detective looked more like a football player than a cop.

"Too bad."

Rhiannon ignored the clearly-heard mutter. "I'm a psychiatrist and I wanted to ask you about a previous case."

"Have a seat." Rhiannon sat in a chair beside the desk as Detective Sanchez returned to his. "What previous case?"

"The murder of Maggie Grolier."

Sanchez frowned, "Why are you interested?"

"Dr. Gilman asked for my assistance. It falls into my field of expertise."

"And you want to know why I keep up with Phobos's progress?"

"Yes, and I want to understand what caused Phobos's

illness."

Sanchez sighed and rubbed his brown eyes with the thick fingers on one of his large hands. "How much detail do you want? We still have the crime scene photos on file."

"Your impressions should be enough." She shifted in the straight-backed chair to find a more comfortable position.

"And also very revealing about my character?" His smile was without humor. "Whoever killed Grolier hated her. That's my strongest impression. The girl had been strangled, or at least her throat was damaged characteristic of strangulation. Her esophagus had been crushed. But there weren't any marks on her neck. You've had medical training?"

"Enough to know that's impossible."

"Then once she was dead, the killer clawed her face off."

Rhiannon blinked, "Clawed?" That one class in criminal psychology hadn't said anything about killers like this.

"The eyes were gouged out and you could see individual scratches at the scalp and jaw lines. But there wasn't any skin left on her face. And there wasn't any blood."

"There had to be blood."

"On the body, on the floor where the body was lying, yeah there was blood. But there wasn't any blood on the sink, the doorknob, or anywhere else in the Byrd house. You can see the file if you don't believe me."

"I believe you."

"The body wasn't damaged in any other way. No rape, no other wounds, and no clues to identify the killer."

"And Phobos found the body." Rhiannon watched Sanchez flex the knuckles in his hand.

"Grolier had spent the night at her house. They had stayed up late playing seance or messing with a Ouija board. Phobos found the body eight a.m. on March 16 two years ago. The coroner determined that death occurred at two or three a.m. The doors were locked and everyone was asleep until Phobos started screaming. Nothing was disturbed, not even in the kitchen. Strangulation isn't a quick death. The victim has time to struggle. You wouldn't know that by looking at the Byrds' kitchen."

"Phobos woke her family and you—the police—were called in. What happened next?"

"According to everyone, Phobos was hysterical and kept insisting that a ghost had killed Grolier. That she had seen the ghost's bloody hand. And she has never changed her story." He nervously shifted objects on his desk. "I don't know what to make of her story, but she believes it. And everyone else doesn't. I guess I've always felt sorry for the under dog."

* * *

Rhiannon jotted down ideas into her notebook as she stepped into her office. Haydon sat at his desk and stared at dark brown haired girl sitting in one of the waiting room chairs. She turned and glared at Rhiannon who had to steel herself against the desire to step back. "Hello." She glanced at Haydon, "Little sister?"

"Not his." The girl's scornful tone didn't improve her glare.

"Meet Phedra Byrd, Phobos's little sister," Haydon answered. "I went to see the Byrds' house and she accused me of trespassing. When I explained my very good reason for being there, she decided she wanted to see you."

"Okay, what do you want to know?"

Phedra's expression was a mix of anger, worry, and distrust. "For starters, why are you interested in my sister?"

Rhiannon snapped her notebook close and held it in one hand. "I'm studying her case."

"For a tell-all book? We can sue you for that."

"No. I want to help her."

"Right, like I haven't heard that one before. That's why she locked herself up, because everyone's told her she needs help. My sister isn't crazy."

"I never said she was." Rhiannon walked across the outer office to the door of the inner one. Phedra jumped up to follow her inside. "It's very demeaning to call someone crazy before you have all the facts."

The distrust eased slightly from her expression. "Where were you two years ago? Maybe you could have stopped Brenda

from putting Phobos in that place."

Rhiannon set the notebook on her desk and moved back to the door before Phedra could follow her inside. "Brenda?"

"The mother," Haydon answered.

"Stepmother," Phedra glared. "She's the one who kept telling Phobos that she was crazy for insisting that a ghost killed Maggie. She wouldn't let her go to college. Couldn't let the loony get away from home; Brenda said it better, of course, but that's what she meant. After six months of harassment, Phobos checked herself into Watson. I thought she did it because that was the only way to get away from Brenda." Phedra sank dejectedly into the closest chair. "Turned out she had started believing Brenda." She looked up at Rhiannon. "My sister isn't crazy and she isn't a liar."

"Thank you for your opinion, Miss Byrd."

"Those are facts, Dr. Cathmor."

"Will you wait here while I speak privately with Mr. Penn?" Phedra nodded and Haydon ducked into the inner office. "What did you find?" She asked as she shut the door.

Haydon opened the notebook he had pulled off his desk. "The Byrd family: Philip Byrd, the father aged fifty-two. Brenda Cartwell Byrd, second wife aged forty-eight, homemaker, married to Philip for ten years. Lydia Woodworth Byrd, first wife, deceased. Two daughters from the first marriage: Phobos, aged nineteen, and Phedra, aged thirteen."

"And people think my name is odd."

"Welcome to the age of creative naming." He turned to the next page in his notebook. "I got their current address and the one where the murder occurred. They moved as soon as the police cleared them of any suspicion. So I decided to go see the infamous house and got accused of trespassing by a thirteen-year-old."

"What about the ghost Phobos claimed killed Maggie Grolier?" Rhiannon leaned back in her office chair.

"I found the newspaper's version, which should always be viewed cynically even when it is reporting current events. A friend of mine at the university is sorting through his collection of ghost stories. I'm waiting for his phone call."

"You have a friend that collects ghost stories?"

"Yeah, well I have weird friends."

"What did you find out about the victim?"

"Next to nothing. I've got her statistics. Everyone I've talked to claims she never had an enemy in her life. Just a nice, mundane kid that got dead. Did you find out anything interesting from the police?"

"Nothing human could have killed her."

"Great. Now that we've ruled that out do we call in Mulder and Scully?" A light suddenly signaled on the phone on Rhiannon's desk. "Just kidding. That's probably my ghost hunting friend."

Haydon bounded out of the inner office and answered the ringing phone on his desk. Phedra looked inside and Rhiannon waved for her to enter. She did cautiously, surveying the room completely before sitting in a chair in front of Rhiannon's desk. "My sister isn't crazy. Before she checked into Watson, she told me that she wasn't lying, that she wouldn't lie about the murder of her best friend, and she must be crazy because she knows a ghost is responsible."

"And that's proof of her sanity?"

"Don't make fun of me, Doctor! You think you can push me around just because I'm a kid? The only reason Phobos thinks she's crazy is because Brenda drilled it into her head!"

"How many times are you going to repeat yourself? Brenda has convinced Phobos that she's crazy. It isn't the first time that has happened and it won't be the last. Now why did you accuse Mr. Penn of trespassing?"

Phedra's lips turned down in a sullen frown. "One of my friends told me there was a man sneaking around. I thought Mr. Penn was him. I made a mistake. That house was my mother's. Now it belongs to Dad, me, and Phobos. Dad's out of town, so that leaves me to protect our property. Brenda isn't going to."

"So you decided to stop this snoop all by yourself?" Rhiannon raised her eyebrows. "Doesn't that sound dangerous?"

"I'll admit it wasn't a well-thought plan. I was sorta making it up as I went. But if I called the police, what would they

do?"

"Arrest him, maybe?"

"Only if my parents press charges. Brenda hates that house and Dad doesn't do anything that will upset Brenda." She stared at the filing cabinet in the corner of the office. Her voice lost its bluster and picked up a little confusion. "There's a ball of light dancing on top of your filing cabinet."

"There is?" Rhiannon turned and looked at the filing cabinet. As far as she could see, nothing was on top of it or reflecting off the dark wood paneling on the wall. "Stop messing with my files. I can't spend all my free time cleaning up after you."

Phedra's brown eyes competed with each other to swallow her face as she turned to face the door. She turned back to stare at Rhiannon. "You just talked to a ball of light. And it just jumped down and ran out the door. Did you see it?"

"No, I have to take your word it was there. But it does explain why I keep finding paperwork in the wrong folders." Rhiannon smiled gently. "There's a lot in the world that needs explanation."

Haydon leaned into the office by hanging onto the door frame. "Who wants to hear a ghost story?"

"What?" Phedra twisted around in her seat.

"The ghost of Durchett Street. That sounds like a title to a Goosebumps book." Haydon let go of the doorframe, walked into the inner office, and pulled the matching armchair beside Phedra's.

Phedra glared at him. "I wouldn't know. I like Poe, Lovecraft, Bloch, King, and Lee. People who really know how to write."

He returned the glare. "Maybe the comment wasn't directed at you."

What happened between these two out of my presence?

Rhiannon wondered. "What did you find out?"

"That whole neighborhood used to be the Durchett plantation. The Byrd house is built almost on top of where the old plantation mansion used to be. The oak tree in the Byrds' front yard used to be in the Durchett's front yard. You get the picture. Elizabeth was a servant in the house who fell in love with

someone--variations of the story vary the guy. The important thing is that the housekeeper was in love with him too so she hired a couple of men to kill Elizabeth. These men got her out of the house, took her to the oak tree, and" Haydon paused and glanced at Phedra. "The next part is pretty graphic. I don't want to contribute to the delinquency of a minor."

Phedra's face expressed the scorn she must have felt for Haydon's obvious stupidity. "Elizabeth was raped, cut up, and hung in the oak tree to bleed to death. That's where she was found the next morning. The tree has never been cut down because any time it's nicked it bleeds. People sometimes see Elizabeth standing by the tree with the saddest expression on her face. I grew up on this story, moron."

"Then let's go see where you grew up." Rhiannon interjected quickly.

* * *

The Byrds' house on Durchett Street was one-story, shaped like a sideways and deformed L. The garage at the left end was wide enough for two cars and gave the building an asymmetrical look as it jutted out into the driveway. The driveway resembled a white snake basking in the sunlight as it laid across the neatly landscaped front yard. The different shades of green from the forest behind crowded against the tan-colored house.

Rhiannon drove her car up the slightly curving driveway and parked it where the sidewalk to the front door met the white gravel. A huge oak tree's sprawling limbs brushed against the driveway and the sidewalk.

"Gee, it looks so . . . normal." Haydon finally commented from the passenger's seat.

"You must have grown up in a freak show." Phedra's voice stabbed from the back seat.

Rhiannon sighed, feeling the muscles in her shoulders knot. She sent a silent prayer to the Fates for letting her be an only child as she opened the driver's side door. She heard the other car doors slam shut as she ducked under the mossy limbs of the oak. When one usually saw an oak tree as old as this one, the first

adjective to come to mind was majestic. This particular tree inspired isolation with the way the limbs swept up and down, shielding the trunk from prying eyes. It's as if it's demanding that everyone ignore its tragedy, Rhiannon bit her inner lip. And I just entered the private sanctum.

No sentinels guarded this sanctum; they didn't need to. Emotional appeal was a stronger weapon than any forged by human hands. The sensation rippled through her like a vibrator set on tremor. And each time her guts recoiled from a vibration, the level of tears rose in her grey eyes. "I'm sorry." Her long fingers with their professionally-manicured nails brushed against the rough bark of the trunk. "I'm so sorry." Those words are so inadequate.

She stumbled out of the canopy. Haydon and Phedra were waiting on the sidewalk. "Dr. Cathmor?" He took a tentative step forward.

Thrice curse power suits! You can't carry anything practical when you wear one--like a box of Kleenexes. Rhiannon wiped her cheeks with the palms of her hands and dried those hands on her skirt. Twice was enough to restore an appearance of emotional stability. *My dry cleaner is going to have a fit. Next time, I'll have to dress more practically. Next time?*

"Dr. Cathmor?"

"I'm all right." She inhaled deeply to keep her nose from running. "I can see how it could be strong enough to manifest."

"But Elizabeth's a nice ghost." Phedra said in a tone of someone rapidly losing patience. "She had a sad life, a sadder death, and she's a sad ghost. How could she kill Maggie?"

"Maybe she didn't. Maybe another ghost is masquerading as Elizabeth."

Phedra glared at Haydon. "That's absurd."

"You gotta better idea?"

"No, but at least I know that's a stupid one."

"Do you two need to go wait in the car?" They both turned to Rhiannon who was rapidly approaching the house. Haydon and Phedra watched her move up the sidewalk, pause at the front door, and walk around the top of the L. "I think we're

annoying her."

"You think?"

The harmony of the land was ruined. Rhiannon paused behind the house, out of sight of Haydon and Phedra, and listened. The forest was ten feet away from the house, enclosing the backyard, but no birds sang. And it wasn't the sudden silence because of her intrusion; no birds had sung in the front yard either. The realization made her uneasy. Was this the effect murder has? She shook her head. She had to finish surveying the house, and she stepped forward.

The shock wave threw her off-balance. She stumbled, fell to her hands and knees, and gripped the earth to keep her place. Her hands and arms tingled with numbness as the earth cried out its violation. Rhiannon sucked in air, trying to regain control over the sheer intensity of the pain.

A woman shimmered in front of Rhiannon, a woman in a long white dress. Her black hair cascaded down her back and rippled in the wind, but was kept off her face by a wide, white blindfold. She held a sword in each hand, crossing them in front of her. A red smear covered the blades, sliding down the metal to pool at the guard of the swords before spilling over to spread across the woman's hands.

The ground quaked under Rhiannon's fingers. She moaned. The air thundered and her ears rang. *It would be so easy to give in. That's what it wants*, she realized. *For me to give my Gift up to it.*

The woman smiled underneath her blindfold. Her right arm unbent, offering Rhiannon the hilt of her sword and resting the blade against her white-sleeved arm. A flash of light on the woman evaporated her skin and exposed the skull underneath. "No, I can't." Rhiannon dug her fingers deeper into the soil. "I won't." The woman stepped forward. "I won't!"

A bright light distracted the woman. Rhiannon dropped her head and stared at the individual blades of grass. "Dr. Cathmor!" The woman retreated, taking her swords with her. Rhiannon shuddered involuntarily. "Dr. Cathmor!" The voice sounded so far away.

"Dr. Cathmor!" Haydon grabbed hold of her thin

shoulders and pulled her upright. "Are you all right?"

Phedra gulped, "It was never this bad before."

Haydon pulled Rhiannon to her feet. She didn't resist, worrying him more than he was willing to admit. His stomach churned and cramped. The last place he had been that had affected him this badly was a Civil War battlefield. "Come on, we're getting out of here." He led Rhiannon around the garage and Phedra followed.

Rhiannon took a deep breath and shook her head. Haydon had hold of her arm and they were walking down the driveway to the car. "Haydon?"

He stopped. "You're awake. You had me worried. What happened?"

Rhiannon took another deep breath and shook her head. "We have to get rid of it. It may not be influencing Phobos's condition, but it isn't helping it."

"It's not a demon, is it?" Phedra's voice was small.

"I don't think so. Can we go inside?" Rhiannon gestured at the house.

"Sure, I got a key."

"Are you sure it's a good idea?" Haydon's expression was stony.

"For now it is." Phedra scampered up the sidewalk, pulling a ring of keys out of her pocket. "It's not going to take me by surprise again."

Haydon didn't say anything, but followed her and Phedra inside. Shadow forms of draped furniture emerged out of the dim room. "That's just the furniture Brenda didn't want. And the electricity's turned off."

"That's okay. Which way's the kitchen?"

"This way." Phedra led them straight across the long living room to a hallway that receded into the night and an archway. "That's the kitchen," she pointed through the archway. "And I really don't want to go in there."

"I don't blame you," Haydon muttered.

"Haydon, could you get my kit out of the trunk?" Rhiannon handed him the car keys.

"You're not an ordinary psychiatrist, are you?" Phedra asked suspiciously as Haydon left.

"Your sister liked to research the paranormal. That's what got her into this trouble. Did you ever read some of her books?"

"Some." Phedra led the way back into the living room, folded back the sheet on a loveseat and sat down. "I understood a little bit of it too. One basic idea was that there are a lot of different forces on Earth, but not everyone can see them. But certain people can. Phobos is one of those people, isn't she? One that can see?"

Rhiannon folded back the rest of the loveseat cover and sat down next to the girl. "Yes, she is Gifted. That's what I call them. And so are you."

"Me? There's nothing special about me."

"You saw the fairy in my office."

"That light? That was a fairy?"

"Yes. He shows up whenever he feels like it. Has since my college days." Haydon set the old-fashioned doctor's black bag at Rhiannon's feet and collapsed on the floor Indian-style. "Haydon's Gifted too."

Phedra turned to him, for once, with an expression not colored by contempt. "Is that how you knew something was wrong earlier?"

"Yep. I got a radar for trouble."

"So what do we do now?"

Rhiannon took a deep breath. "We have to get rid of that thing."

"Do we even know what that thing is?" Haydon frowned, "Other than it's nasty."

"It feeds off death and suffering. It has a tie to Phobos because of Maggie's murder. And we have to break that tie." Rhiannon pulled the dingy black bag onto her lap and opened it. She pulled out a small green velveteen drawstring bag. "Haydon, place one of these in the middle of every doorway and window in the kitchen."

Haydon took the bag. Inside were at least a dozen of quartz spikes. "Right." He stood up, unfolding his legs in one

fluid motion.

"Here, Phedra." She pulled a necklace over the girl's head. It was a metal Celtic cross hung from a black cord. "Keep this on."

A crash echoed through the farthestmost wall of the living room. "That was on the garage," Phedra whispered looking up—terrified—at Rhiannon.

Rhiannon stood up. "Haydon?" There was no answer from the kitchen. "Haydon?" She motioned for Phedra to stay seated in the living room as she walked toward the kitchen's doorway. "Haydon?" The kitchen was empty and its door to the garage was open. "Something's wrong." She turned back to the living room. "Phedra, I want you to" *Someone's behind me*, Rhiannon looked over her shoulder but all she saw was a fist.

* * *

Rhiannon pushed herself off the linoleum-covered floor. The right side of her jaw and the back of her neck throbbed. "Phedra? Haydon?" She blinked and looked around. The room was empty, venetian blinds covered the windows, and the door was shut.

She stood up and with a wobble realized she had lost one of her dress shoes. She kicked off the shoe and heard the high-pitched scream. "Phedra!" She grabbed the doorknob. It was locked.

The door was a cheap, particleboard one. Rhiannon threw her weight against it. It jarred but stayed in place. Another scream echoed down the hall. She threw herself against the door. The doorknob gave and the door swung out into the hall.

A cold wind wrapped itself around her like an icy blanket. It yanked and pulled her down the hallway to the point where the hall, the living room, and the kitchen met. Rhiannon grabbed hold of the wall as the wind tried to force her inside the kitchen. The center of the maelstrom was in the center of the room. Jake held Phedra in the center of the wind and the white-gowned and blindfolded woman approached them—her bloody hands outstretched. "Jake! No!"

He looked over his shoulder. "You won't stop me this

time! You won't be able to confine this to a graveyard!"

"Phedra! Fight! That's what's hurting Phobos! That's what killed Maggie!"

A glow surrounding the girl grew brighter. "Get out! Get out of my mother's house!" The woman faltered, her hands still outstretched. "Get out! Go back to hell!" Phedra's glow blazed forward, surrounding the woman in a bubble of visible white energy. The woman pantomimed a scream as the bubble shrank and disappeared. The instant it vanished, Phedra's glow dimmed and the wind stopped.

Rhiannon quickly took the few steps between her and Jake and threw her arm around his throat. He released Phedra and grabbed Rhiannon's arm. Phedra scampered out of the way. Jake yanked Rhiannon's arm and twisted his torso. The result was a throw that tossed her against the kitchen wall. The back of her head thudded against the plaster, leaving a small dent. When the daze cleared a little, Rhiannon found herself sitting on the floor with her back against the wall.

Jake's chest heaved. His shirt was soaked with perspiration. "I'm gonna kill you, bitch! Everything was perfect: one dead, one crazy, and one almost dead. Everything it wanted. And you ruined it! You're gonna die. You're gonna die."

"I don't think so." Detective Sanchez followed his gun into the kitchen. "Hands behind your head." Jake complied.

Haydon knelt next to Rhiannon, as Sanchez placed Jake under arrest. "Your nose is bleeding. I guess it matches the knot on the back of my head." He pulled out a handkerchief and held it under her nostril. "I found him outside while I was looking for help."

"Are you all right?" Sanchez looked down.

Rhiannon glanced up and tried to smile. "I will be as soon as you get him out of here."

"Gladly."

Sanchez forced Jake out of the house and Rhiannon focused on Haydon. "Where's Phedra?"

"I'm okay. He didn't hurt me. Nothing did." She crept up to Rhiannon and knelt beside her, opposite Haydon. "I didn't

know psychiatry was so dangerous."

* * *

Phobos looked up and smiled as Rhiannon entered the session room. "Dr. Gilman says you're the one who found Maggie's killer."

Rhiannon sat down at the table. "Yes, and the man who profited by it and went crazy." *And if he's smart, he'll stay crazy.*

"I don't understand." Her brown eyes narrowed with confusion.

"You were right all along. A ghost killed Maggie. A ghost or another supernatural agency that someone else controlled."

Phobos sighed, blinking her eyes. "A demon sacrifice?"

"Something like that. The point is you were never responsible for Maggie's murder."

She smiled as she ran her hand through her brown hair. "I'm finally starting to realize that now, but I don't think I'll be messing with any more occult stuff."

"I'm glad to hear it." Rhiannon stood up at the table.

"Come on, I think everyone's waiting out in the hall."

Paul opened the door with an expression of a man dying to know what was said but too proud to ask. Haydon winked at Rhiannon then grabbed Phobos's hand. "Pleased to meet you at last. Phedra's told me a lot about you."

"I hope some of it was good." Phobos's smile grew wider as she disengaged her hand from Haydon's.

"It was," Phedra answered. "We get to spend the entire day together. Dr. Gilman okayed it. I'll see you tomorrow, Dr. Cathmor." She gave Haydon a puzzled look as she grabbed Phobos's arm.

"Four o'clock." Rhiannon smiled as Phedra pulled the older girl down the hall.

"What on earth does she need to see you about?" Paul pushed his glasses up his nose and tried not to glare at Rhiannon.

"You don't really expect me to answer that, do you, Paul? It's a breach of doctor/client ethics. Don't worry. If I need your help, I'll ask for it."

The Fable of Ottoman Z

I knew a boy,
a broken boy,
a boy named Ottoman Z.
He was a boy,
filled with joy,
although he could not see.
A small broken boy,
with a golden heart as big as the golden sea.
I knew a boy,
and you may have known this boy,
this boy named Ottoman Z.

He was a boy,
unlike other boys.
He didn't play games,
or play with toys.
He would sit in the dark
and not make noise,
because he could not see.

He would spend all day
within his mind.
Looking there
for what he could find.
Although what he found
was never kind
his heart was filled with glee.

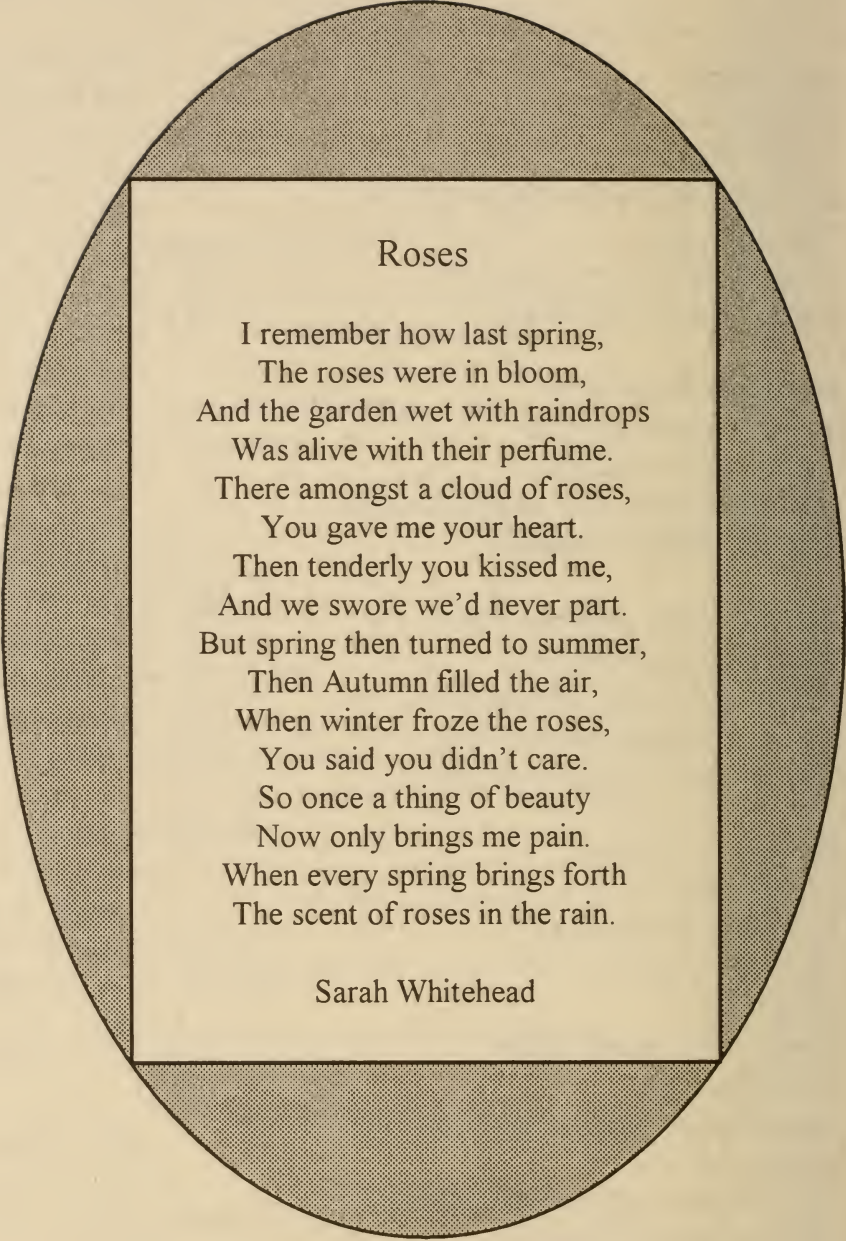
He was a boy,
a broken boy,
a boy like you and me.
He was a boy,

filled with joy,
although he could not see.
A small young boy
with a broken heart as big as any sea.
I knew this boy,
and you may have met this boy,
this boy named Ottoman Z.

One day to his surprise,
he found amidst his cries,
that the past was all lies,
and he had never even opened his eyes.
This boy named Ottoman Z.

And now every once in a while,
if you are up for the trial,
you can even catch the boy smile,
a smile as beautiful as the Nile.
This young boy that's now free.

He used to be a boy,
a broken boy,
a boy who could not see.
He was a boy,
a ragdoll toy
whose solution was to flee.
A forgotten boy
whose forgotten heart was bigger than the sea.
I knew this boy,
and one day you may meet this boy,
this boy named Ottoman Z.



Roses

I remember how last spring,
The roses were in bloom,
And the garden wet with raindrops
Was alive with their perfume.
There amongst a cloud of roses,
You gave me your heart.
Then tenderly you kissed me,
And we swore we'd never part.
But spring then turned to summer,
Then Autumn filled the air,
When winter froze the roses,
You said you didn't care.
So once a thing of beauty
Now only brings me pain.
When every spring brings forth
The scent of roses in the rain.

Sarah Whitehead

My Blessed Donii

Warm water cascades down
cliff's worn granite façade.
Rushing river's wild roar
conjures Beauty's soft face.

From sandy shore I see
waterfall's fume figure
slowly takes solid form.
Illusion becomes alive.

My blessed Donii stands
with woman's supernal
grace on lagoon's surface.
Unclothed curves entice me.

With movement fluid as
ocean she beckons me.
Careful ease stands me tall.
Thru faith I float forward.

Her brilliant presence pulls
my eager essence quick
over clear pool's icy seal.
Empty body lies still.

Long limbs open wide to
welcome my passion's sharp
embrace; two energies
become one; ecstasy.

Steven Cooper

The Second Solstice

Tis winter come to roost.
Blackbirds cloak trees
in leathery leaves and
Frost gouges a crystalline pox.

The sky shimmers,
grey, opalescent,
a veil of static dust,
with dryads and sylphs
frozen in wooden screams
of cracked, brittle bark.

In arthritic agony,
lockjaw joints of skeletal
limbs claw feebly
at a smothered, solar disk,
the piteous oculus of a
god in the throes
of temporary disposition.

Great beasts huddle,
crumpled within the earth,
whimpers of defiance
masked among frostbitten breaths.

Puffed-cheek winds
encroach in vaporous swaths,
herding pin-pricks of life
into a pen of cirrus wire.

A symphony of ravens
take wing, then fall,
the beginning of a long,
obsidian curtain call.

Michael Arnaud

To Touch Lips, but For A Moment

I've crossed the boundary.
The undefined boundary of ecstasy.
We locked hands, our lips touched.
I felt faint, but only momentarily.

To have loved, to have held, to have wanted.
I've been there before.
I'll always be grateful till the end of time,
and forever more.

I've crosses the boundary,
doing so seductively.
It was never meant intentionally,
to fall in love heavily.
But nevertheless I did.

To have loved, to have held, to have wanted.
To defy the laws of monogamous love.
To be obsessed with passion.
To feel ward inside, with just a look from his eyes.
I've been there before.
I'll always be grateful till the end of time,
and forever more.

Tricia Williams.

Forcing the Issue

Jack Day

"You can't win, Darth. If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine" – Obi-wan Kenobi (*Star Wars*). Most people recognize the quotation (just slightly less recognizable than "Luke, I am your father") as the famous lines said by Obi-wan Kenobi to his arch foe Darth Vader just moments before dying (*Empire*). In addition, most people who recognize the statements tend to agree on the meaning of the words – that in death, Obi-wan achieves a greater power by becoming one with the Force. While this interpretation satisfies the general public, a question remains as to whether it satisfies the criteria of Obi-wan's prediction. An examination of the quotation shows that Obi-wan predicts two specific occurrences: 1) that Vader cannot win and 2) that he (Obi-wan) will become more powerful than Vader can imagine.

Examination of Obi-wan's statements, in comparison to the rest of the saga, indicates a double meaning to the quotation. While the second statement holds true, to a degree, to public opinion, to satisfy the combined criteria of the two sentences the second sentence requires a metaphorical translation. Specifically, Obi-wan's uses "I" not simply to indicate himself, but any adversary of Vader (be it Obi-wan or another). For the purpose of the saga, Luke Skywalker, not Obi-wan Kenobi, satisfies the criteria when positioned in the metaphorical "I." This observation derives from an examination of the powers that both Obi-wan and Luke possess, their ability (or lack thereof) to defeat Vader, and the basic plot of the story.

Can It Be Kenobi?

Interpreting the quotation literally calls attention to Obi-wan's existence after his death. His ability to exist, even after his physical demise, lends significance to the statement of his power. Obi-wan joins with the Force's energy and his communion with it allows him to manifest vocally and visually as a spiritual entity.

In *Star Wars*, his manifestations happen only within the mind of Luke Skywalker. The first event occurs seconds after Obi-wan's death. Shocked by the death of Kenobi, Luke forgets his personal safety and attacks the Imperial Storm Troopers waiting in the hanger bay. Although Obi-wan died just moments before, his voice urges Luke to run and escape. His words jolt Luke, making him conscious of his predicament, compelling him into action – essentially rescuing him. Later in the story, Luke receives Obi-wan's advice during the attack on the Death Star. As Luke attempts to target the Death Star's exhaust port, Obi-wan instructs him to "use the force," instead of the computer (*Star Wars*). Confused by the presence of the voice in his head, Luke ignores the advice. Obi-wan then tells Luke to trust him. Reassured, Luke switches off the computer and trusts his instincts, and the force, to guide his shot. The significance of this event stems from Obi-wan's apparent ability to manifest in any location. Because of his spiritual state, Obi-wan has no physical needs and can therefore exist in environments deadly to living creatures. However, his spiritual state acts as a double-edged sword.

As a spirit, Obi-wan apparently lacks the ability to physically manipulate objects in the material world. Following his death, Obi-wan acts simply as a guide for Luke Skywalker. His physical connection to the material world appears to have disappeared with the loss of his body. While such a loss is logical, it does not explain why he fails to manipulate objects with the force. If he retained this ability, he could attack Vader directly instead of relying on Luke. Since he acts indirectly, it is feasible that he lost this power as a result of his death. In fact, Obi-wan himself suggests this when he warns Luke about confronting Vader in *Empire Strikes Back*. As Luke prepares to leave Dagobah, Obi-wan states, "If you choose to face Vader, you will do it alone. I cannot interfere" (*Empire*). Despite the freedom Obi-wan gained as a result of his death, he cannot directly oppose Vader.

The importance of this fact lies within the interpretation of Obi-wan's statements. His ability to exist after the destruction of his body suggests an increase in his power. However, his inability

to directly oppose Vader apparently negates his argument that Vader cannot win. While Vader cannot eliminate Obi-wan's presence from the universe, he can destroy the Rebels and their cause. This suggests an alternate meaning in Obi-wan's statements. If, as Obi-wan says, Vader cannot win, then someone must provide him with significant opposition. Given the power Vader possesses, his opposition must hold "more power than [Vader] can possibly imagine" to defeat him (*Star Wars*). That power resides in the person who eventually causes Vader's defeat – Luke Skywalker.

Powers of the New Hope

One aspect of Luke's power resides in his ability to use the Force. As Vader states in the Death Star conference room, "The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force" (*Star Wars*). In *Star Wars*, Luke has tremendous potential for such power, although untrained. Vader recognizes this potential during the Battle of Yavin (when Luke destroyed the first Death Star). As he attempts to destroy Luke's X-Wing, he remarks that "the Force is strong with this one [Luke]" (*Star Wars*). In addition, Emperor Palpatine comments on the potential of Luke's powers in *Empire*. He regards Luke's powers as "a great disturbance in the Force" (*Empire*). Recognizing that Luke could destroy him, the Emperor tells Vader that Luke "must not become a Jedi" (*Empire*). In a final remark about Luke's potential, Obi-wan tells Luke that "the Emperor knew . . . if Anakin were to have any offspring, they would be a threat to him" (*Jedi*). Although Luke lacks the knowledge to use his powers, his mere existence represents a threat to the Empire.

If Luke's potential suggests the power he might possess, his actions illustrate his application of that power. In *Star Wars*, Luke demonstrates his potential by using the Force, rather than the targeting computer, to aim his proton torpedoes—consequently destroying the Death Star. In *Empire*, Luke refines his skills while studying with Yoda, the Jedi Master. He learns some control over the Force, evident by his ability to manipulate objects through the use of telekinesis. In addition, he uses the Force to expand his

senses, allowing him to see into the past or future. Unfortunately, Luke lacks significant control of the Force. Obi-wan notes this as Luke rushes to meet Vader and warns him that he "will be tempted by the dark side of the Force" (*Empire*). Ignoring the warnings, Luke struggles against Vader and loses not only the battle but his hand as well. At the pinnacle moment of the movie, "Luke teeters, both literally and figuratively, at the edge of the void, and there is no way back to life except through Vader. Rather than surrender to the dark side, however, Luke chooses an almost certain death" (Henderson 88-89). Despite this, Luke survives and continues his training – eventually becoming a Jedi.

The power displayed through Luke's actions, however, is not as important as his final perseverance against the corrupting powers of the dark side of the Force. Despite the warnings of his teachers, Luke dangerously treads on the path to the dark side. In *Empire*, Luke's fear and anger overwhelm him as he encounters Vader's shade on Dagobah. He cuts the shade down and encounters the haunting image of his face under the faceplate – an omen of his possible future. In *Jedi*, despite his best efforts, he succumbs to the Emperor's goading. His rage consumes him, driving into action. When he gains temporary control of his emotions, Vader spurns him once again. Luke loses control of his senses and overwhelms Vader with a barrage of attacks. By giving into his anger, Luke becomes a force "more powerful than [Vader] can possibly imagine" (*Star Wars*). However, this course of action satisfies only one of Obi-wan's statements. Destroying Vader by calling upon the dark side would cause the powers of the dark side to consume Luke – leaving him a tool for the Emperor. As such, Vader (or technically, the forces that drive Vader's actions) would win, negating Obi-wan's first statement. Ironically, the Emperor enables Luke to persevere against the dark side. Enthralled by Luke's actions, the Emperor states, "Your hate has made you powerful. Now, fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side" (*Jedi*). Stunned, Luke glances at Vader's wrist (where he had cut off the hand moments earlier) and at his own mechanical hand, enshrouded in a black glove. According to Andrew Gordon, the "mechanical black hand is a

standard science fiction emblem of evil which represents a pure fear of machine takeover" (Gordon 199). Knowing that Vader is more machine than man, Luke recognizes the symbolism of the hand and realizes that his actions could turn him into another Vader. This thought gives him the strength to expel his anger and reject the dark side.

Blood is Thicker than the Dark Side

While Luke's abilities with the force give him some measure of power, his true strength comes from the relation he shares with Vader – he is Vader's son. Of course, in *Star Wars* the only person (other than Luke's "uncle" Owen and "aunt" Beru) aware of this fact is Obi-wan Kenobi. If Obi-wan does use the metaphorical "I" to represent Luke, he could use Vader's lack of knowledge to confuse the Dark Lord. Having defeated Obi-wan, Vader assumes a false sense of security, stating, "This will be a day long remembered. It has seen the end of Kenobi and it will soon see the end of the Rebellion" (*Star Wars*). However, Vader needs to be concerned with Luke, not Obi-wan. According to *Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Characters*, Vader discovers Luke's heritage during the time between *Star Wars* and *Empire Strikes Back*. Luke, who believed his father murdered by Vader, discovers the truth during *Empire* and changes his outlook on the situation. In recognizing the importance of this relationship to the plot, it is necessary to understand this; "Lucas knew that what Vader tells Luke is crucial enough that he refused to give actor David Prowse the lines. Prowse acted the scene with dummy lines. The voice of James Earl Jones was later dubbed in" (Wyatt 605). Before learning the truth, Luke views Vader with hatred and contempt. With the revelation of their relationship, he realizes that he does not need to kill Vader to defeat him. In fact, he tells Obi-wan that he can't kill his own father. To this, Obi-wan replies, "Then the Emperor has already won" (*Jedi*). However, Luke feels he can still win. Unlike Obi-wan, Luke believes that he can free Vader from the dark side of the Force. In addition, the Emperor may believe it is possible as well. As Luke descends upon the Endor moon, Vader senses his presence – the Emperor

does not. As such, the Emperor grows suspicious of Vader's intentions. He wonders whether Vader's "feelings on [the] matter are clear" (*Jedi*). Meanwhile, Luke declares to Leia that "there is good in him [Vader] . . . I can turn him back to the good side" before he leaves the Rebels to confront his father (*Jedi*). In confronting his father, Luke attempts to draw him away from the emperor. He urges his father to "let go of [his] hate," stating that Vader will be forced to kill him if they go to the Emperor (*Jedi*). Vader sends Luke, despite his urging, to the Emperor. However, the power of Luke's words amplifies the conflict within Vader. Luke's comment that his father "is truly dead" confounds Vader (*Jedi*).

In their final confrontation aboard the Death Star, the relationship between Luke and Vader overcomes the power of the dark side. After Luke regains control of his emotions and rejects the dark side, the Emperor becomes infuriated and attacks Luke with Force lightning. As Luke suffers from the powerful bolts of energy, Vader is forced to watch the Emperor drain the life away from his son. After several minutes, the spectacle, coupled with the pleas of help from his son, becomes too much for Vader. Resolving his conflict, Vader grabs the Emperor (absorbing the bolts in the process) and hurls him into the abyss in the center of the throne room. Close to death, Vader urges Luke to leave him behind. When Luke refuses, arguing that he has to save his father (who is Vader no more), Anakin simply replies, "You already have Luke, you already have" (*Jedi*). In doing so, Luke fulfills Obi-wan's prediction. Luke's power draws his father back from the dark side – Vader loses, defeated by a power greater than he could imagine.

Whose Quest is this Anyway?

Of course, some may argue that Obi-wan's statements have no reflections on Luke's actions throughout the saga. While certainly possible, the death of Obi-wan suggests the use of a multiple meaning. Janet Vertesi argues that "it is Luke's destiny alone to face his father, his own evil side, and Kenobi can no longer interfere directly" (Vertesi 3). Vertesi makes an important

observation in that the final conflict is a destiny between father and son. The film supports this position. In *Star Wars*, Obi-wan tells Luke: "Your destiny lies along a different path than mine" (*Star Wars*). In another line from the movie, Vader hints that Obi-wan's death may be his destiny. Specifically, Vader tells Governor Tarkin that "Escape is not his [Obi-wan's] plan. I must face him alone" (*Star Wars*). The fact that Obi-wan does not plan on escaping suggests that he intends to sacrifice himself so that Luke may escape. In *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Mary Henderson provides additional support. She states:

In the classic structure of the hero's journey, the guide can only bring the hero so far, and Ben has now fulfilled his functions: he has ferried Luke across the preliminary threshold, given him the magic talisman [his father's lightsaber], introduced him to the ways of the Force, found him a pair of hero partners and protectors, brought him to the princess, and enabled his escape (Henderson 57) And, like the classical guide, Obi-wan leaves the new hero to fulfill the quest. As Marilyn Sherman notes, "Luke Skywalker is young, inexperienced, naïve and governed by a strong sense of fair play. Darth Vader is a murderous combat veteran powerful enough to break a man's neck with one hand, cunning, completely ruthless, and he hasn't got a chance (Sherman 9). As Vader's defeat lies in Luke's destiny, Obi-wan makes no suggestion that he should be the one to complete the quest. In fact, he notes that he is no longer able to undertake such adventures. For example, he attempts gain Luke's help by saying, "I need your help Luke. She needs your help. I'm getting too old for this kind of thing" (*Star Wars*). Luke's destiny is set when he makes the conscious choice to join Obi-wan – when he decides to "learn the ways of the force and become a Jedi like [his] father" (*Star Wars*).

Of course, the proof of the meaning lies not only within the texts of the movie, but in the desires of its creator, George Lucas. According to John L. Flynn, in the first draft of the movie Luke was an aging general. However, Flynn states, "Lucas felt there was much more room for character development, if he introduced a young innocent who must grow to manhood, and keep the story

central to him. By the next draft, Luke had become a farm boy" (Flynn 8). Lucas' decision to have a young man play the lead character supports the idea that Luke, not Obi-wan, is to possess the power that will cause Vader's downfall. Perhaps more important than Lucas's vision of the main character is his decision to have Obi-wan die. LucasArts' *Star Wars: Behind the Magic* reveals the secret behind Obi-wan's death. In a special "behind the scenes" section of the program, the narrator provides the following information:

In the original shooting script for *Star Wars*, Obi-wan Kenobi is not slain by Vader. However, Lucas soon realized that 'after they escape from the Death Star, there isn't anything for Ben to do.' With only two months until the start of principal photography he decided that it would be more dramatic to have Ben die halfway through the film. (*Behind the Magic*) Lucas's statement, that nothing remains for Obi-wan to do, offers finality for discussion of the quest. Obi-wan's time is over, and any opposition left for Vader resides within Luke Skywalker.

In Conclusion

Through the use of metaphoric language, simple statements, phrases, and terms are skewed from the normalcy that society places upon them. To understand their meaning, it is necessary to seek out the potential variables and eliminate those that conflict with the primary message. In Obi-wan's line, the general consensus of his meaning appears flawed when a logical connection is sought between the pair of sentences. Alternate possibilities, when applied using evidence from the saga, suggests a feasible connection being Obi-wan's prediction and Luke Skywalker's destiny. However, such a conclusion requires the public to ignore the simple message being broadcast and listen for a better compromise. Or, with respect to Obi-wan's words, "Your [ears] may deceive you. Don't trust them" (*Star Wars*).

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Silhouette
Antwinette Cofield



Misty Pope

White Doves

Soft as satin,
White as snow,
In the sunlight,
A palely glow.

All together,
High above,
In a circle,
A sign of love.

Mysterious patterns
In the night,
A sudden scatter,
Doves of white.

Tricia Williams

Poetry?

My "poetry"
is a mockey
of poets.
My words
are not flowery
nor my ideas pleasant.
I do not write
of love and joy,
because I know not love
and rarely feel joyful.
Instead, my "poetry"
is morbid, dark and gloomy.
My words do not rhyme.
My images are of death,
and decay.
I am not a poet
and my words are not poetry.

Sparrow

*Let's go out, me and you, to the Southern
Florida Keys. We will live on the
Beach in a three room house
Ten miles out of town.*

*All that I ask is just you and me
live together in peaceful harmony
During the week we'll lounge
at the house.*

*In the Afternoons, when the sun begins to
go down, we'll watch it from our
porch, drinking our beer from our little
Fridge we'll keep on the side,*

*And watching the ball games on our
six inch black and white TV, the only signs of
modern civilization in the place,
aside from necessities.*

*The weekends, glorious weekends, we'll go, me
and you into town and drink ourselves silly
at the bars, enjoy the nightlife, and
come home late and love each other.*

*And all that I ask is that it's
me and you, forever enjoying
each other's company, lying
on the beach side by side.*

*No more glorious a thing could I
imagine, peacefully winding away the
best of our years of my life
(the ones with you) in
Paradise.*

April 16, 1998

J.P. Smith

Apple Creek's Royce Complex:
A Look at Louisiana Work Ethics
Matthew Barton

Apple Creek's complex in Royce, Louisiana, sprawls over the countryside like a gigantic, tree-munching demon. It eats forests and excretes plywood, lumber, and money. All day long the log truck come to this Mecca of mills. Slowing down only as they make the ninety-degree turn into Apple Creek. The truck drivers wait in their cabs while the monstrous clawed arms of the unloading machines relieve them of their burden. The drivers then go back to the lumberyard for more logs as the demon devours its feed. The machines can cut a whole tree into marketable-sized pieces in about thirty seconds. Apple Creek is updating their old, obsolete machinery, and soon this time will be cut by at least half.

The terrifying might of Apple Creek is a sight to behold. To one unacquainted with the industry, the process is hard to imagine, even with photographs. But what of those men who scamper here and there, tightening pipes or running forklifts? What of those who stand diligently at the reigns of this behemoth, bleary-eyed, protected from the ear-piercing roar of the machinery by tidy foam earplugs? The stench of the chemicals used to keep the timber fresh clings to hardhats, safety goggles, and coveralls, following the employees home to their families. The employees at Apple Creek are easy to overlook in the tempest that surrounds them.

Last summer I worked at Apple Creek. My experiences there taught me a lot about the psyche of Apple Creek manual laborers. I was not only able to observe and communicate with these strange denizens, but was one of them. I befriended men who had worked at the complex since their youth—some for more than fifty years. Have these men lived pathetic and self-pitying lives, toiling endlessly for a scanty reward? Through my experiences at Apple Creek, I learned that these men do not consider themselves degraded by their occupations. Their jobs mean more than a steady paycheck. Their work gives them a position in an intricate network of friendship, authority, empathy,

and pride. In this essay, I will focus on the work ethics of Apple Creek's employees and compare them with the thoughts of Franklin, Thoreau, and Tocqueville on the subject.

Briefly, allow me to introduce the texts I will be using and explain their significance. The *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* represents work ethics that are still held dear by many Americans. "God helps those that help themselves," Franklin wrote in 1757 (188). The second text is Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, an interesting work from any angle. Thoreau gives us a very different philosophy on life than Franklin. Thoreau's work ethic, simply put, is to do no work that is not absolutely necessary for physical existence and spiritual improvement. For example, Thoreau removes three pieces of decorative limestone from his desk for dread of "dusting them daily" (79). The third text, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, provides insight into the mind of the American working man, even though he was mostly concerned with political affairs, not workers. I can verify his ideas and generalizations from my own experience at Apple Creek. His dire warning that American manufacturers may one day create an American aristocracy, for instance, must not be ignored. Obviously, determining which set of work ethics is the "best" is an intricate and confusing task. Let us, then, assume the role of hard-working Americans and attempt, with the grease of our elbows, to put things in order.

Benjamin Franklin

The work ethics of this "scientist, inventor, educator, diplomat, politician, and humorist" are easily found in his autobiography and subsequent writings (qt. From back cover). One of Franklin's stories is about a sea captain who keeps his sailors from growing "mutinous and quarrelsome" by having them "scour the anchor" on idle days (158). This philosophy of staying perpetually busy plays an important role at Apple Creek. One of Franklin's classic maxims, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," can be heard from supervisors and workers alike at Apple Creek. From the supervisor's viewpoint, a hard worker is a monetary asset. Lazy or slothful workers

subtract from profits. From a worker's viewpoint, a good relationship with their supervisor gives them added prestige and, most importantly, job security. The chances are great that most of Apple Creek's employees do not realize the connection between their exhaustion after work and Franklin's advice.

Franklin's work ethic can be summarized easily. First, one must take advantage of every possible minute of the day, and remain as industrious as possible. One must always be looking for ways to improve his wealth and usefulness to the community. "Plough deep while sluggards sleep," Franklin advises (189). Franklin had an obsession with time. In a letter to a young tradesman, Franklin wrote:

Remember that time is money. He that can earn Ten shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle on half of that Day, tho' he spends but Sixpence during his diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Experience; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides. (185).

Second, if one has leisure time, one must use that time to do something useful. "Leisure the diligent man will obtain, but the lazy man never," Franklin writes (190). Of all of Franklin's maxims and beliefs, perhaps his concepts of leisure are the hardest to understand. After performing manual labor all day, Franklin would have pursued a hobby. One of Franklin's leisure activities was conducting deadly experiments with lightning.

At Apple Creek, employees that embody Franklin's principles are not hard to find. Brother Charles retired a few months ago, ending a long history of service to the complex. He was well known for his dedication to his performance. While other employees would often hesitate before beginning a difficult task, Charles was determined to start the job and get it finished. For the summer workers in the Utility Department of the complex, being assigned to Brother Charles meant hard work. When Brother Charles was not working at Apple Creek, he was working for his family. Even Sunday was no day of rest. On the Sabbath, one would find Brother Charles preaching or preparing a sermon.

Henry David Thoreau

In 1845, Thoreau went to Walden pond in an effort to “live life deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach” (135). Thoreau wanted to remove himself from all superfluous elements of life. “The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run,” Thoreau writes (73). He questions the logic of “spending the best part of one’s life earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it” (97). A modern day example of this fallacy is Jack Holden, Apple Creek’s plumber. Like Brother Charles, Holden has worked the majority of his life at the complex. He once told me how he had “saved a little here and there” for his retirement, when he planned to “sit back and enjoy life in a little trailer on the river.” Thoreau would have told Holden he had made a mistake. Thoreau agreed with Franklin that time is a precious, limited resource—but Thoreau argued that that time is best spent doing only what one wants to do. Thoreau boasts about how he “sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs ... until by the sun falling in at my west window ... I was reminded of the lapse of time” (157). If a supervisor caught someone staring out the window for an hour, the chances are likely that the supervisor would have the man fired.

There is little time for abstract thought for most of the employees at Apple Creek. One friendly employee of Apple Creek, a young man named Paul Waffer, must stand in position for up to four hours at a time, carefully examining each plank that passes by on the conveyor belt in front of him. This is not a job Thoreau would have enjoyed. When I asked Waffer if he liked his job, he replied, “It’s all right. I’m making some money to pay my bills. Got nothing better to do.” This response reminded me of Thoreau’s description of the Canadian woodcutter:

The intellectual and what is called spiritual man in him were slumbering as an infant. He had been instructed only in that innocent and ineffectual way in which the Catholic priests teach the aborigines, by

which the pupil is never educated to the degree of consciousness, but only to the degree of trust and reverence.

I Recommended to Waffer that he read Walden, but I doubt my advice will be heeded. The problem here is that Waffer has grown so accustomed to his trade that he cannot contemplate life without it.

In another chapter of Walden, "Where I lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau discusses Americans who "think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, but whether we should live like baboons or men is a little uncertain" (136). I saw this attitude reflected by the guide who accompanied me while I took my photographs, he suggested a new machine. This machine, he told me, would allow for even greater efficiency. When I asked if I could photograph him, he declined.

No one follows Thoreau's work ethic at Apple Creek. I do not doubt, however, that some have tried. They were simply fired and removed from the picture. There are several employees, though, that will admit they "do no more than they absolutely have to."

Alex de Tocqueville

"In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest circumstances that the world affords," Tocqueville wrote, "but it seemed to me as if a cloud habitually hung upon their brow" (430). I made a similar observation during my employment at Apple Creek. One worker was particularly infamous for his desire to work long hours of over-time. The man's desire for money caused him to spend the majority of his time at the mill. Even though he could boast about a new bass boat he had just bought, he seemed rather sad that he could not yet afford a new truck. His work ethic was inseparable from his lifestyle.

"He who has set his heart exclusively upon the pursuit of worldly welfare is always in a hurry, for he has but a limited time at his disposal to reach, to grasp, and to enjoy it" (431). On this point, Tocqueville seems to side with Thoreau against Franklin.

Tocqueville believes that the reason for this restlessness springs from equality. Since everyone is on the same starting platform, it is hard for one individual to surpass everyone else.

Another concern of Tocqueville is that American manufacturers will enable the rise of an American aristocracy. "When a workman is unceasingly and exclusively engaged in the fabrication of one thing, he ultimately does not work with singular dexterity; but at the same time loses the general faculty of applying his mind to the direction of the work" (450).

Tocqueville argues that as the workman improves, the man is degraded (450). "What can be expected of a man who has spent twenty years of his life in making heads for pins," Tocqueville asks (450). What can be expected of Paul Waffer?

When a workman has spent a considerable portion of his existence in this manner, his thoughts are forever set upon the object of his daily toil; his body has contracted certain fixed habits, which it can never shake off, in a word, he no longer belongs to himself, but to the calling he has chosen ... A theory of manufacturers more powerful than customs and laws binds him to his craft, and frequently to a spot, which he cannot leave; it assigns to him a certain place in society, beyond which he cannot go (451).

Evidence of Tocqueville's idea can be seen all over Apple Creek. Who is Jack Holden? He is a plumber for Apple Creek. Without their professions, they lose a critical part of their identity. Their craft earns them respect and a positive image of themselves. They have worked so long at Apple Creek because their reputation and self-image depends upon their performance. "Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion," Thoreau wrote (50). For men like Brother Charles and Jack Holden, their drive to work is not so much influenced by their supervisor, but their own idea of their worth.

Tocqueville warns that an aristocracy may be created when the gulf between employers and employees becomes too great. Most employees of Apple Creek have never met, or even seen, the

owner of Apple Creek. Apple Creek is a notional company that spread from California, to Montana, and finally to Louisiana last year. A few months ago Apple Creek announced that they would be closing down the plywood mill at the Royce Complex. Two hundred employees will lose their jobs. While I was taking my photographs, I was denied access to the plywood portion of the mill. The gate guard told me that she expected vandalism any day now. "The worst part is, they are getting rid of the gate guards too," she said, "then hell will break loose when ex-employees start tearing up everything." She figured that plywood production would drop dreadfully low these last few months. "I can't believe Apple Creek is doing this," she said sadly, "we really depended on this place." Unfortunately for the gate guard, the Apple Creek Aristocracy is not interested in her complaints. They cannot hear them from their mansions in California and Montana.

Conclusion

The work ethics of Franklin, Thoreau, and Tocqueville differ in many ways. Franklin's "Way to Wealth" is simple and sweet. America is the land of opportunity; to rise to the top, all one must do is work hard and stay honest. In no time, one will be happy and content. Thoreau challenges this idea, and argues that only by living simply and purposefully can a man achieve happiness. Thoreau asks the simple question, "Who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier and earlier every successive day of his life, till he became unspeakably healthy, wealthy, and wise?" (173). Tocqueville wonders why Americans are so restless in the midst of their prosperity---why does democracy affect men in such an unfortunate way?

Democracy obviously plays a role in the work ethics of Apple Creek. Men like Wallace Ingles and Jack Folden have had little formal education. In many social circles, they would be looked down upon. At Apple Creek, though, they are entitled to not a little respect. While I was being given the tour, my guide introduced me to an elderly man working a planar machine: This is the man that keeps this part of the mill running," my guide told me, "we couldn't do it without him." The elderly man looked like

he may have been in his late sixties. If he had retired, he could have been just another old man in an "old folk's home." At Apple Creek, he was a respected individual. Many of the younger employees looked up to him in awe. The chance of another individual taking over his position when he retires, and lasting for as long, is doubtful. I feel that we are nearing the end of an era. The new machinery of Apple Creek will require only about one fourth of the current workforce to operate it. I am fortunate to have been given the opportunity to experience the old Apple Creek. The new promises to be more efficient, more profitable, and a lot less human.

What will happen when Tocqueville's Aristocracy of Manufacturers no longer needs the lower class for its labor? Will Franklin's pompous, American maxims begin sounding sarcastic in the mouths of the rich? These are issues that deserve careful observation, and will continue to plague my mind as the march of progress finally outpaces the march of laborers.

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Regrets

Do you
understand
that now
that I've left you,
made the decision to
walk away,
even if it means
losing you
forever,
now that in my mind -
at least -
I've walked out on you,
I regret my choice?
Do you know that now
I'm sad,
scared that you know
that I'm capable of
such acts,
and you will think
that at any moment
I might get up
and do it all over again?
But I tell you
I will not.

Never again
will I leave you.
It pains me now
to be apart from you,
even when work demands it.
To be apart
is to emphasize
my actions,
to reenact my departure,
to relive the moment of decision
when I told myself that
leaving you - losing you -
was justifiable by the pain.
I endured by remaining
under my father's disapproving gaze.
I don't want to relive that moment,
to reenact the beginning of our separation.
I want to prove to you
my love is still strong,
and even stronger than it was.
I want you to see
proof of my devotion
in my presence at your side.
I want my
loneliness to end.

Jasra

Ockham's Razor

Sleeping Dragon

Ashley awoke to the brain-splitting scream of his alarm clock. He wearily pulled the flannel blanket over his head in a feeble attempt to drown out the infernal beeping. After a few moments, Ashley groggily pulled the covers off of himself and dragged himself to the side of his bed where he could reach the "off" button on the alarm clock if he stretched just enough. He smiled to himself as he felt the button slide into place and heard the noise cease. He always got a ringing in his ears from the lack of noise right after the alarm was killed, and this time was no exception; the music of the spheres played gently upon his eardrums. He slowly opened his eyes, letting them adjust to the bright morning sun. He could feel its warmth on his face even before he fully opened his blinds. He glanced at the clock; 7:45. He was glad he had wasted only 15 minutes this morning regretting the fact that he had to get up. But as mom had always said, "The early bird gets the worm."

It was about noon when Ashley sped through the gates of Necopo University. It was Monday and he was already late for Dr. Patti's class on ancient philosophy. He tried to no avail to find a parking spot near the building where his class was being held. He cursed the administration of the university under his breath and drove out to the library parking lot, about a 10-minute walk from the philosophy building. He found a parking spot at the library without any problems. "Hell," he thought to himself, "I'll be lucky if I make the last ten minutes of class." He hurriedly evacuated his car, taking his books with him, and broke into a dead run for Ockham Hall. He dreaded being late for one of Patti's classes; he would stare you down for the entire class period and find all sorts of reasons to ask rather obscure questions of you if you had the gumption to show up late for one of *his* classes.

* * *

Trish was late, again. Of course, it didn't really make any difference to her if she was late. As long as she could sign the roll and not be counted absent for the day she wasn't worried. She

was just that sort of gal, real laid back. Too laid back, some people said, but she thought she had her priorities in order, and making it to class on time was certainly not one of them. Right now all she was worried about was that perpetual pounding situated somewhere between her ears and behind her eyes. She laughed out loud as she thought to herself, "Well, well, what *did* we expect would happen to our pretty little head after we saw it fit to consume vast and unspeakable amounts of alcohol?". She quickly stopped laughing when the pain in her head moved around a bit and objected to the pressure of laughter. She winced a little as she finished getting dressed and slowly bent over to pick her book bag up off the floor of her room. She grabbed a pair of shades from one of her dresser droors and slid them on. The cool plastic felt good against the sensitive skin behind her ears. "I'll have to remember that one," she thought; "sunglasses=semi-hangover reliever". She seemed content with her discovery and left the room to her slumbering roommate Kelly. She locked the door before heading down the hall and out of the dormitory towards the math building, Gregory Hall.

He didn't even see her as he rounded the corner. He smashed into her with enough grace to make a paraplegic circus midget envious, but he redeemed himself when he tucked and rolled smoothly over his shoulder and back onto his feet without a pause. Those few months he spent training in Taijutsu had really paid off. Trish couldn't move; she was stunned by the force of the blow and the resonance of the now excruciating pounding in her head. Ashley looked down at her. Her hair was messed because of the fall and strands of it fell about her tanned face like a cascade of harvest wheat. It sparkled here and there where the sunlight that was strong and brave enough to make it through the shade of the ancient oak trees around them dared to touch. Her shades were askew, and he could barely see her eyes. They were deep, soft, and brown, like tranquil pools of darkest amber. They too sparkled and glimmered from the heavenly light. He snapped himself out of it. "Class!! You're already late for class! This is no time to be chasing skirts," he thought. "I'm terribly sorry, miss." The words came out of his throat smoothly and delicately. Trish

liked that; at least her headache did. He was off again before she could say anything to the stranger. "Shit! I'm bleeding. Great."

* * *

The semester had started out slowly, as they always do, but after midterms time started flying by at an alarming rate. Ashley was just a freshman and Trish, if everything went according to schedule, was going to be graduating by this time next year. The two had fallen in love rather quickly. Too quickly, some said, but they didn't really seem to care. The months flew by all too fast for Ashley. Part of him wished that he could just live one eternal day with Trish. She occupied his thoughts all day and he hers, or so he thought...

* * *

It was late in the Spring semester of '97 and the Necropo campus had never looked better. Ashley spent a lot of the very little time that he had away from Trish wandering around and just taking in the beautiful campus. Necropo University was known for its magnificent campus. Lush greenery and ancient oak trees covered it with their wisdom. That was one of the reasons that he made the choice to go away from home to get his "higher education." The thought made him laugh. He was a firm believer in the uselessness of a "higher education," especially one obtained from Necropo. He had left his mother in upstate Virginia to go off to college. He had taken a Greyhound all the way down to Louisiana and the trip had taken something out of him. If he had had a car and had driven down from Virginia, the trip would have taken him a little more than a day. The bus ride had lasted a little more than 48 hours. All that time packed in with a busload of total strangers. He had made the most of it, though, and had spent most of the time reading some books on esoteric martial arts and meditation. It was in one of these books that he found out about Sifu Harry Green over in Santa Monica, California.

Sifu Green was supposedly one of the most renowned and well-respected American kung-fu masters. He ran a training camp in Flighterville, California (population 1007). He advertised the camp in all the martial arts magazines as "Now you don't have to go to China!" and "Class is limited to ten students." Of course,

Sifu Green took only dedicated students for the course. Ashley had heard about the camp a few years back and had dreamed of someday going there to learn Hsing-I, a kung-fu style that stresses the inner development of the practitioner, but he had thought he would never get the money to go. The training alone cost \$2000, a pretty price for a college student.

The student loan check came in the mail on the sixteenth of April. Ashley wasn't expecting it to get in this semester. He had a lot of trouble getting his mother's tax information to the school and when he finally did it was three months late. He didn't have his hopes up. He opened it without hesitation and immediately tore the university envelope to shreds with the utmost glee.

"Sixteen-hundred dollars! Yes!!!" He had saved up about a thousand dollars over the course of the past few semesters. He had to eat a few more macaroni and cheese dinners than he would have liked to, but he really wanted to go on this trip and train with Sifu Green. He could barely contain himself as he rushed to the phone to call Trish.

"I got the check today!...sixteen-hundred...yeah, I know.. I think so, isn't that great..mind if I come over and celebrate?...OK, I'll be there in about 30 minutes or so...I love you too...see ya soon." He hung up the phone and dashed into the shower. The sound of his singing echoed throughout the house, "Everybody was kung-fu fighting." He hastily dried off, threw on some clothes and headed over to Trish's house. It usually took him about 30 minutes to get there. He never really thought about the time, though. When he was walking to Trish's house, he was just glad that he was going to get to spend time with her. It took him only 15 minutes this time. He had many reasons to get there quickly.

He knocked on the door. "Who is it?" Trish called from her bedroom. "It's Ash." "Hang on a sec." She turned the dead-bolt slowly, and he heard it click as it slid out of its groove. The door opened before she got a chance to turn the knob. Ash assaulted her with kisses and hugs of pure excitement. She smiled and held him close to her. "Hey, baby, I'm sooooo excited for you!" "Yeah, I think I'm finally gonna get to go. So, where's the

party?" Through the back door of the living room, Ash heard movement in the bedroom. The knob turned and a portly fellow walked through the door. The young man was a childhood friend of Ash's. They grew up together in a small town in North Louisiana before Ash had to move away with his mother. His near-black hair was pulled back in a topknot. "Hey, Ash," Charley said. "Hey, Chuck. Did you hear the news?" "Yeah, Trish was just telling me about that." "So whaddya think?" "Cool man. I hope you have a good time in California." Chuck moved towards him and embraced him. "I'm happy for you man. I hope you learn a lot while you're there and maybe you can show me a few things when you get back." "Sure thing, Chuck."

* * *

He left on the eighth of May. He had gotten into a little spat with Trish about a week before he had to leave for California. Just a little lover's quarrel. About a month before that they had broken up for a few weeks. It tore his heart out but he learned a lot from the experience. He was always trying to learn from life, and he was pleased that he hadn't gone through the experience of losing Trish, even for a few weeks, without gleaning some information from it all. He boarded the bus to Flighterville without looking back. It was best that way, he thought.

The training was *intense*. He and the rest of the guys there (sadly, for Ashley anyway, there were no female students. He had hoped that there would be at least one, just to make the training more interesting and to force Sifu Green to address raw muscular power in the techniques) started every day off right, with a two-mile jog and a half-hour of iron palm training. As he expected, he made fast friends with a few of the guys there. Intense training like that bred some really close friends. He liked that part of the training especially. A few years back he had thought about joining the service and trying out for the Navy S.E.A.L.s. He figured this was as close to that type of training that he would ever get. Days turned into weeks.

It was lunchtime when the call came through. He was eating lunch with two of his friends, Hank, an exceptional martial-artist from the Virgin Islands, and Bill, a

government-employed cartographer. He heard one of the other guys scream out of the shack that was used as a kitchen, "Ashley! You got a call!" He looked at Hank and Bill. "Great, someone must have died or something." "Don't say that man," Hank said. "Well, not even my mother has called me since I've been here. It must be something big." He made for the shack.

"Hello." "Ash," it was Dridia, Chuck's girlfriend and one of the best friends that Ash made at Necropo, "do me a favor." He knew right then that something was really, really wrong. He felt his heart slide like a dying serpent to his toes. "What's that, Dridia?" "Sit down." He slumped down to the floor of the little shack, the refrigerator cold on his back. He could feel the coldness creeping through his back and into his chest. "OK, I'm sitting. What's wrong?" "I don't think you and Trish are ever getting back together." Maybe she was just being paranoid, he thought to himself. He was relieved, for a split second. "It seems as if Chuck and her slept together after you left. Ash, you need to go see a doctor as soon as you can. She gave Chuck herpes and has had it for a long time." Ash was heartbroken. He was angry for a few minutes, but he calmed down quickly. He was glad that Sifu Green had been teaching the students meditation techniques; they helped, a lot. He'd never thought that Trish could have herpes. The thought never even crossed his mind. She filled him in on the ghastly details. The conversation turned into a jumbled mess in his head. Something about how Trish had brought some guy home from a bar two nights after Ash had left for California. Jesus! He hadn't even made it to California before she was sleeping with another guy. Dridia also said Trish and Chuck had slept together on more than one occasion, and the only reason she found out about them sleeping together at all was because Chuck got herpes from Trish. Apparently, Chuck had thought that Dridia "deserved" to know what had gone on. It didn't seem like they would have stopped, either; they seemed to think it was neat or something like that. Dridia told him that just about everyone back home, except for Ash, had known about this for at least a couple of weeks. He couldn't take it anymore. "Dridia, I need to make a few phone calls. Thank you for telling me. I know you had to turn against

Chuck to do this; I know he asked you not to tell anyone about it. You're a real friend. We'll get through this, I promise. Take care. I'll keep in touch." "OK, Ash, take care of yourself. I'm sorry I had to be the one to tell you." "You did nothing wrong, Dridia; thank you for looking out for me. Bye-bye." "Talk to you later Ash." The phone fell from his hands. "Damn." Ash was devastated. He made a few calls here and there, called Trish and got nothing accomplished. He called a few of his "friends" that he knew were aware of what was going on before he did. Hell, as far as he knew he and Dridia were the last ones to find out about this mess.

* * *

The bus ride home was a blur. Just a few weeks ago he was basking in the California sun and now he was back in Louisiana with the humidity and the mosquitoes. Chuck had moved in with him. Ash and Trish were officially history, and he was going about his life. Something had changed in him, and he knew it. His heart had felt funny every since he had gotten the phone call in California, and he had told himself that he had forgiven Chuck and Trish. He was wrong, though.

* * *

The hot Santa Monica sun beat down on him as he walked through the streets. It felt good to finally be done with school. After graduating from N.U. he had come here to study traditional Chinese medicine. His classmates had thought that he was a bit "weird" at times and said that he was quiet. Usually he was, but not today. Today he was a licensed herbalist, acupuncturist, and traditional Chinese medicine practitioner. It felt good. He had graduated at the top of his class and was looking into opening a private practice in upstate Maine. He had always wanted to live there and now he had his chance. He had bought the plane ticket a week ago and had already made reservations at a hotel there. Of course, he had other reasons for going there. The beauty of the whole thing was that not a single person in the world knew that he was tracking them over the years. Not a single living, breathing person. No sir, he had made sure of it.

Along with the TCM training, he had received intensive

instruction in T'ai Chi Chuan and Hsing-I Chuan and had almost managed to obtain the rank of Shidoshi in Taijutsu. He thought that it was sort of ironic that his hands and feet were licensed as deadly weapons...licensed to kill and licensed to heal. It gave him a deep feeling of accomplishment. All the books on martial arts that he had ever read always said that if you really wanted to be able to heal you had to be able to kill and vice versa. He was well versed in both areas and now he was ready.

* * *

It was the summer of 2004. Trish and Chuck smiled down at Mona. She just smiled back at them in that infant sort of way. She was a good kid, for the most part, and her parents were quite pleased to have her. Trish had to give birth by a C-section, one of the little complications of being a mother with herpes. She frowned down at the ghastly scar that ran across her tummy. It was that sickly pink color that scars get to be after they have been exposed to a good dose of sun and her bright pink bikini drew even more attention to it. Chuck noticed her gaze. "Aww, baby, it's not that bad. We have a wonderful little girl, and I still love that adorable little tummy of yours." The comment made her smile. "Thanks, hon. I needed that." She looked out over the mountains that were "in your backyard," just like the pamphlet had said they would be. She and Chuck had decided to go on vacation to the mountains after they thought Mona was old enough. The grandparents didn't think she was, but it wasn't their kid anyway. Trish wanted Mona to love nature as much as she did, so she already had plans in her head for years to come. Right now all she was thinking about was how great her life had turned out. Chuck was the best husband anyone could hope for and she had the most adorable little girl in the world. What more could a girl ask for?

* * *

He knew. He knew all about them. They thought that it had been too long, thought that he was only a memory. As he boarded the plane he chuckled smugly to himself. It was all too perfect. He was due in Maine in a week. It would only take him a day to get to Arkansas. He held the bus ticket in his hands. He checked his arrival time in Arkansas. Two days before the murder.

How could he possibly be in Arkansas when he was on a bus headed for Maine? He could barely contain the laughter that swelled in his breast. It was all too easy to find out where they were. He had figured that they would end up together after school. How could Chuck have done that to him? His "best friend" as Chuck had called him on so many occasions. He didn't have to know. He would feel *much* better very soon. In about 32 hours to be exact.

* * *

The plane screeched down at about the same time Chuck and Trish were getting ready for bed. They had rented one of the deluxe cabins, so they used the spare room for the baby. As the lights went out, Chuck gently kissed her. "Goodnight, bubblebutt." "Goodnight, hon." The lights clicked out, and there was silence throughout the cabin.

* * *

He picked up his bags at about 10:00 P.M. He walked across the street and rented a room with the fake I.D. he had spent the last 2 ½ years perfecting. "We hope you will enjoy your stay with us, Mr. Gentry." "I'm sure I will. Thank you and have a pleasant evening." He walked calmly down the hall thinking to himself, "hammer...no.... knife...almost, but not quite...."

* * *

Friday dragged on for what seemed like a lifetime for Trish. She and Chuck had spent most of the day hiking and they had left Mona with a babysitter at a small town at the base of the mountain. The scenery was beautiful, but she was relieved to get back to the car and head to the babysitter.

* * *

He rented the car right after he got everything in order at the hotel. He used the perfect fake I.D. along with an insignificant portion of his "special" savings in order to obtain it. He would head out to the mountains in a few hours. He made reservations there over the phone right after he got back to his room. He had everything he needed; blacksuit, mask, weapons, and food, everything someone would need if they were going on an extended trip. He was done preparing by about 1:30. He left for

the mountain at about 2:00. He got there right on schedule. It was about 4:00 now. He had plenty of time to set up camp. He parked the car at the local church and put his gear on when he reached the side of the mountain. He knew all about stealth and he couldn't even hear himself breathe on the trek to the mountain. All he heard was the wind in the trees and the water in the streams. He would make it up to the top in about two hours or so. He checked his watch; 6:00. He still had plenty of time so he climbed a nearby oak and rested on one of its mighty branches. He laid back and felt the wind go through his hair. He loved that feeling. It reminded him of a younger time and place. It reminded him of true love and Trish. Kelly occupied his thoughts these days. They were to be married in two months. He looked forward to the wedding. He loved her very much. "No," he thought, "I must keep my mind on the task at hand."

If anyone else was there with him, they would have seen the way that the moon shined in his eyes, and they would have felt an uncomfortable shiver of fear and revulsion when they saw him sharpening the razor on a piece of leather. *schick...schick* he envisioned every detail of the murders. *schick...schick* He had planned this for months. Every since he found out through an old friend from N.U. that they were going to the mountains in Arkansas. He figured that this is where she would go, and a call to the front desk of the place reinforced his intuition. He and Trish had come here once when they were in love. Good memories. The razor stopped for a second. "Love; it's just a fucking fairy tale." The razor slid across the leather with renewed fervor.

It was about 11:00 when the back door opened. They hadn't locked it. "Funny," he thought, "they must not have expected me." He could hear her breathing and his heart jumped into his throat. The rising and falling was so beautiful to him. He still loved to just listen to her breathe. He stood there, motionless, and listened to her. He could hear the strained breathing of Chuck back there too. It was a god-awful noise that had to stop. Ahh, but the drugs first. He pulled a small vial of a viscous fluid from his pocket. It would paralyze them for about an hour. He was glad that he had gone the extra mile in that herbal studies class. He

almost had written a research paper on poisons, but he had stopped himself when he thought that it might leave a trail for the authorities after they performed the autopsies. There would be at least two.

He made his way into the bedroom. Trish didn't like sleeping with the door to the bedroom closed, so that was one less thing he had to worry about. He opened the vial and applied some of the toxin to a rag. The poison was very strong. All one needed to do to affect the victim was to touch his/her skin with a drop of the stuff. He rubbed the rag liberally on one of Chuck's feet and quickly followed with Trish's. The bed shook for a moment. He lit a candle he had brought with him so they could see him. He was smart enough to wear a mask and to pad his clothing slightly. The padding made his movements even more silent and gave the added bonus of making him look far bigger than he actually was. They would never know who he was. It was great.

He saw the fear in Chuck's eyes first. That special kind of fear that shows up when one is completely immobilized. He wouldn't be afraid for long. Ashley stepped towards Chuck, pulled the sheets back and took a straight razor out of his fanny pack. He sat at the end of the bed and sharpened it on the leather strap for a few moments. He didn't say a word. The only sound in the room was the *schick, schick, schick* of the razor. Ashley showed the razor to Chuck and reveled in the fear he saw in his eyes. Ashley slid the blade across the backs of Chuck's ankles and felt the tendons separate. His hands were suddenly warm through the latex. He saw Chuck's eyes water. He was glad to see the bastard in pain. He slid the blade deep into Chuck's left calf and left it there to warm up. He wouldn't want the baby to have to feel a cold blade...

He found the infant asleep in her little crib. She was almost the most horrible and grotesque sight his eyes had ever beheld, second only to Chuck's naked body. He wiped the infant's brow with the rag, grabbed her in his warm hands and took her into the bedroom. He took a long look at the Trish's naked body. She was so beautiful. Her breasts rose and fell with her struggling breath. He laid Mona on Chuck's chest and spread a little crimson across

her lips. He walked over to the other side of the bed and picked Trish up. He could see the revulsion in her eyes, and he hated it. He would show her what revulsion was really about. He leaned her up against the headboard and placed the infant in her lap. He glanced over at the razor in Chuck's leg and ripped it out violently. He slid the blade over Chuck's face until the blade was no longer shining but dulled with blood. He moved Trish a little closer to the bastard so she could feel his blood on the sheets. Tears streamed down what was left of Chuck's face. His body shook. Ashley wiped the blade in Chuck's hair, slicing his scalp as he did. The blood flowed freely on the once white sheets. Ashley gazed down on the poor fool as he moved to the end of the bed. He sat there, at the foot of the bed for what seemed like hours to Trish. "My God," she thought, "what is he going to do now?" She wanted to run, wanted to scream, wanted to shut her eyes, but she couldn't. All she could do was watch. Ashley gashed open both sides of Chuck's neck and blood splattered all over the room and its inhabitants. He would be dead soon, he thought, better make this quick. He left the room quickly and came back with a filet knife from the kitchen. He could still see the light of life in Chuck's eyes as he severed Mona's left arm. The baby would die quickly from the loss of blood. Chuck wanted to kill the bastard, wanted to save his family. He was losing everything he had in just a few short minutes. Ashley went about his business with the skill of a butcher; he was glad he got to practice on the cadavers back in Santa Monica, and soon the babe lay in pieces in her mother's lap. Chuck was nearly dead. Ashley cut his eyes out of the sockets. The room was filled with the smell of feces, urine, and blood. He put his tools next to the candle and was gone.

* * *

He got back to his room a little bit ahead of schedule and took what he thought was a well-deserved shower. The next morning he was on the bus to Maine. He was going to meet Kelly there. She would be so happy to see him again.

A DECISION

Only hours ago I knew
that if I was to do it,
I had to do it right,
no mistakes, no half-job.
I was leaving, and I knew
I couldn't come home.
If I turned around on my own,
walked back to the place I left,
I would be announcing my
feelings to everyone,
showing, somehow, that I
needed and wanted help.
But I don't want help.
I just wanted to die,
but I am too weak to do the deed.
Instead I chose to walk away,
knowing that without shelter,
without food, I would die eventually,
without violence.
I would waste away,
or I'd get lucky
and a murderer would find me
hitch-hiking and an easy victim.
That way my end would come sooner—
less suffering.

But then you came to me
with your love and your logic.
You told me your heart's story, then
sacrificed your feet to the ants,
and your pride to the ignorant
redneck bullies who chose to
call you names from within the safety
of their moving vehicle,
all for my sake.
You gave yourself to me,
showing me your pain
but never wallowing in it as I have done.
You shared with me a
moment of truth—
if I couldn't leave then,
when my heart was heavy from
living too much (or maybe too little),
I would never be able to.
I could never again try to walk away
from you – from us.
We are one.
You feel what I feel.
I know that now.
I am sorry for my transgressions
against you – against us.
Forgive me.
Please.

JASRA

The Problem of Expressionism in Taoism

Sleeping Dragon

Taoism is a mystical tradition that has its roots in the prehistory of China. This tradition, like many of the mystical traditions of the world, is couched in symbolic language of all sorts and riddled with what would appear to be completely contradictory statements. Taoism, like most mystical systems, claims that ultimate reality, in this case the "Tao", is ineffable. Even though the great Taoist sages have said that the true, eternal Tao could not be spoken of, they have written innumerable extensive treatise on the Tao. This apparent lack of communication would appear to be a problem at first glance but, as I will show, the Taoists have still managed to successfully express themselves and their philosophies in many different ways. Although the Taoists make the claim that ultimate reality is ineffable, they still convey many important ideas, teachings and concepts through various forms of discourse. The Taoists have indeed written about the Tao at great length and have found other ways to express the Tao through various other art forms such as poetry, the healing arts, and the martial arts.

Taoism is a name given to two different movements in Chinese religion and philosophy. Taoism is divided into two main classes, religious Taoism, known as *tao-chiao*, and philosophical Taoism, known as *tao-chia*. Those who are not familiar with Taoism generally regard these two systems as being the same thing. However, the two systems are very different from one another. This becomes apparent upon closer inspection of Taoism in general and philosophical Taoism in particular.

The distinction has been made between the early phase of Taoism as philosophical and the later development as religious. The distinction is an important one, and for two very different reasons. On the one hand, Taoist philosophy with its sense of the ineffable majesty of the unknowable ultimate

reality construed the life of man at its highest as one of contemplation and of being impregnated with the power of the Tao. It was, therefore, in a real sense other-worldly, construing life in terms of eternity. On the other hand, Taoist thinkers, having come to regard the very ordure as containing some element of the Tao, and being completely pacifist in the face of the evil in the world, were not moved to fight superstitions. In the last resort, should not all knowledge be called superstition? Hence in time beliefs in magical qualities in things, in fairy men of prodigious age and magic power gathered about this sublime philosophy, and the name Taoist became degraded from its high philosophical estate. In both systems lie enshrined the dreams of the Chinese people about life in this world and life in the light of eternity, and because there is for them no rigid dividing line between the two, therefore both Confucianism and Taoism are at the same time religious cults and philosophical systems. (Huges and Huges p. 26)

Some scholars of Taoism say that it came into existence only as an opponent of Confucianism, while others claim that Taoism had been around long before Confucianism was created and that the development of Confucianism only made the Taoists of the time give a name to their practices in order to distinguish themselves from the Confucianists.

The history and early development of philosophical Taoism is somewhat of an enigma. Traditionally it is believed that Huang-Ti, the "Yellow Emperor", was responsible for the popularization of Taoism. Huang-Ti is one of the legendary emperors of China. He supposedly ruled China from about 2697 BCE to about 2597 BCE and is credited with the invention of the compass, the pottery wheel, the written language of the early Chinese, and the martial arts. He is also credited with writing a book entitled Huang-Ti nei-ching (Inner Classic of The Yellow

Emperor). This book is supposedly the first treatise that was ever written about Chinese internal medicine. Some legends say that Huang-Ti learned the teachings of Taoism from an ancient sage and later went on to develop systems of meditation, martial arts, and healing that were based on what he had learned from this sage. The legends also claim that he lived for a period of about one-hundred years. At about this age he acquired supernatural powers and created the golden elixir, which granted him immortality. He then ascended to heaven on the back of a dragon and became one of the five mythological emperors who rule over the five cardinal directions, North, South, East, West, and Center. It was over the Center that Huang-Ti ruled. Huang-Ti became one of Taoism's chief and most revered deities.

Another important figure in the development of Taoism is Lao-Tzu. Lao-Tzu has been called by many different names and scholars debate as to whether or not he actually existed. He is credited with writing the five-thousand characters of the Tao Te Ching (The Book of the Way and Its Power), possibly the most important book in the Taoist canon and, like most Taoist writings, is actually written in poetic verse. Legends say that he was a minor government official, a keeper of the imperial archives, and that he became dissatisfied with this job. This dissatisfaction led to him leaving the city. It is said that a gate guard, Yin Xi, stopped him when he was trying to get out of the city. It is believed variously that Yin Xi forced Lao-Tzu to write down his teachings before allowing him to leave and that he begged Lao-tzu to document his wisdom before he left the city. This led to Lao-Tzu writing down the five-thousand characters that comprise the Tao Te Ching, perhaps the earliest written account of the ideas of Taoism. After leaving the city, Lao-Tzu disappeared entirely.

Whether Lao-Tzu actually authored the Tao Te Ching is still debated by scholars. Some claim that Lao-Tzu was not a historical figure at all, but a sort of figurehead that was created by the early Taoists. Others say that Lao-Tzu, in fact, did exist but that he did not write the Tao Te Ching. They credit its writing to some unknown author's pen. Other scholars claim that Lao-Tzu did exist, that he did write the Tao Te Ching, but that his name

was not Lao-Tzu. They claim that his name was actually Li Erh and some scholars claim that the name Lao-tzu was actually a pen-name that was used by many different early writers in the Taoist tradition. Whether or not Lao-Tzu actually existed or wrote the Tao Te Ching, it can not be argued that he is one of the most important figures in both philosophical and religious Taoism.

The next individual who had a great impact on Taoism and Taoist thought was Chuang-Tzu, also known as; Chang-Tzu, Chuang-Tse, Chuang Chou and Chang-Tse. Chuang-Tzu lived from approximately 369 BCE to approximately 286 BCE. He, along with Lao-Tzu, is considered one of the founders of philosophical Taoism. Chuang-Tzu took the teachings of Lao-Tzu and made them more accessible to the less mystical mind. In a sense he demystified the teachings of Lao-Tzu. Commenting on this, Feng and English say, "Chuang-Tzu was to Lao-tzu as St. Paul was to Jesus and Plato to Socrates." (Feng & English, p.vii). Chuang-Tzu wrote a treatise entitled Chuang-Tzu, one of the most important books on philosophical Taoism. In it, he expounded upon the basic teachings that are contained in the Tao Te Ching.

It is believed that Chuang-Tzu was a very independent man. Wunsche has this to say about him:

A historical work dating from the Western Han Dynasty contains an anecdote that may serve as evidence of Chuang-tzu's strong sense of independence: "King Wen of Chou, having heard about Chuang Chou's talents, sent a messenger laden with expensive presents to invite him to join his court and offer him a post as minister. Chuang Chou laughed at the offer and said, 'A thousand pieces of gold in no mean sum, I readily admit, and the office of minister is no doubt an honorable one. But have you ever seen an ox on its way to be slaughtered? Having been carefully fattened over a number of years, it is bedecked with richly embroidered ribbons and led to a great temple. At that moment,

that ox would dearly love to be a little pig to which no one pays any heed, but it is too late then. Leave me! Do not sully me! I would rather wallow joyfully in a dirty puddle than be led on a rope by the ruler of a kingdom. I live as I please and so shall never accept an official post' (Kaltenmark 1981, p.125ff.). (Wunsche p.27)

Out of the teachings of philosophical Taoism (tao-chia) eventually developed what is called by some popular Taoism, and by others religious Taoism (tao-chiao). This development is looked at as being unfortunate by some. It is not clear exactly how and why this development took place. However, it is not difficult to see that the ancient Taoists would not have been concerned with the "bastardization" of their teachings because they were not very concerned with the physical world or the dealings and meddling of humans. However, some Taoists believe that if someone who does not understand the Tao gets in touch with it, then that person will corrupt the Tao itself. Thus, they are very careful about what they tell people about the Tao and what rituals, if any, they teach to their students.

Central to both philosophical and religious Taoism is the concept of the "Tao". There have been many different translations and interpretations of this somewhat obscure term, ranging from simply "path" to "the way of nature". A literal translation of the term gives us "Way", but it can also be translated as "Teaching". There has been a lot of diversity in the ways that scholars have chosen to translate this word. Some translators have given it the same definition as the Greek term "Logos" which has many definitions itself and in that regard is a very fitting translation of "Tao".

"Tao is the one unchangeable element and therefore it is the absolute value; it means the order as well as the god-head of matter and the all-inclusive idea of the eternal arch-symbols of all being. In short, it is the divine All-One of which one can partake - as in all contemplative mysticism - by rendering one's self absolutely void of worldly interests and passionate desires until

release from all activity is attained (wu-wei)" (Weber p 181-2).

In the cosmogonic theory of Taoism, the Tao is the first principle of the universe, from it, although rather indirectly, all things came into being. Gary Doty, a long-time student of Taoism who is being taught by Sifu James McNeil, as follows explained this theory to me,

In the beginning there was total nothingness. This is called the Void and can be thought of as emptiness. The Void is everywhere. Into this Void was introduced a random thought, the Tao. The Tao hit the Void like a pebble hits a pool of water. Ripples, Yin and Yang, spread throughout the Void. This created a friction between Yin and Yang which led to the creation of the five elements [wu-hsing]; Metal, Water, Wood, Fire, and Earth. Then, through the interaction of the five elements the ten-thousand things were created [the material world]. (Doty, 1997)

It is union with, or more precisely absorption back into, the Tao that the Taoists seek. In order to help them achieve this grand goal, they have devised many different "tools". Most of these tools involve the cultivation, stimulation, storage, or movement of what is called "chi" by the Chinese.

The concept of chi plays a very large part in the philosophies and practices of the various forms of Taoism, both religious and philosophical. There are many different definitions of this term. "Spirit," "air," "breath," "vital energy," "ether," and "energy" are all ways that one could translate the word "chi" into English. One way to understand this energy is to conceive of it as biophysical or bioelectrical energy. It can also be understood as life energy. In the cosmogonic myth of Taoism, chi flows through the five elements in order to give substance to the World of Dust or The Ten-thousand Things (both are names given to physical

reality by the Taoists).

This energy is everywhere. In the human body, it flows through what is called the microcosmic orbit. The microcosmic orbit is like a mirror image of the macrocosmic orbit, the flow of chi throughout the entire universe. This idea that the human being is, in essence, a mirror image of the entire cosmos is a recurring one throughout Taoism, both religious and philosophical. Along the microcosmic orbit are intense concentrations of chi which are known as "little heavens" in some Taoist traditions. The little heavens are very similar to the Yogic chakras both in their location and in their function. The Taoists have devised many different ways of cultivating this energy. They labeled these "exercises" as chi-gong, or chi-kung ("energy exercises") There are too many "schools", "styles", and "sets" of chi-gong to list here, but they can be classified into two different categories according to how they develop the practitioners' chi. The first category is called nei-gong, or nei-kung ("inner exercises"). Nei-gong cultivates the chi entirely through inner processes. These exercises do not involve any movement of the body beyond the expansion and contraction of the muscles necessary to breathing. Sitting meditation and standing meditation wherein the practitioner does not move his or her body at all throughout the meditation are both examples of Nei-gong. The second category is that of wai-gong, or wai-kung ("outer exercises"). Wai-gong exercises cultivate the chi by employing movement of the physical body of the practitioner. The various forms of Tai chi and the other internal styles of Kung-fu (Hsing-I, Pa Kua, and Hsiao Chiu Tien), along with non-martial sets of movements that are grouped together in order to form a "style" of what is commonly, and somewhat incorrectly, called chi-gong are examples of this kind of chi cultivation.

"One who says that they know, knows nothing. One who claims ignorance is a master". That is something that a Taoist sage or priest might tell you about those that have knowledge and those that appear to have knowledge, if he or she talked to you at all, and is also a version of a point the Lao Tzu makes in the Tao Te Ching. The Taoist mystics do not like to gain the attention of

anyone at all. This includes mortals, demons, gods, faeries, spirits and anything or anyone else that is capable of giving its attention to a subject. The Taoists would rather be left alone so they could observe natural cycles and rhythms instead of having to deal with society and all of its trappings. In this solitude and seclusion, Taoist mystics sought an elixir. The Taoists think of this elixir in two different ways. Those Taoists who follow the teachings of the Inner Elixir School (Nei-tan) believe that this elixir is a metaphor, and that it is not actually a pill or drug that can be ingested, but instead is a practice of meditation that if properly followed, will result in the attainment of immortality. Other Taoists follow the Outer Elixir School (Wei-tan) which believes that the elixir that bestows immortality is an actual physical thing, and they try to create this elixir through many different methods of refining various chemical substances. The two most important substances in this process are gold and cinnabar (tan) which is red mercury ore.

One of the ways that the Taoists have expressed some of their basic doctrines is through various styles of martial arts, known as kung-fu, or gong-fu to the Chinese. Kung-fu is, literally translated, "time and energy". The Chinese use this term to refer to anything that requires time and effort to master. For this reason, almost everything that a person learns could be called kung-fu. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the term "kung-fu" only to refer to the fighting styles of the Chinese unless otherwise stated. Kung-fu is divided into two sub-classes, internal kung-fu and external kung-fu. The external styles of kung-fu tend to stress the development of the physical body through physical training and physical exercise while the internal styles tend to focus more on the development of the chi. It is true that the external stylist will develop some chi through the course of their training, but the internal stylist will incorporate exercises into their training that have been specifically designed to increase the amount of *chi* in their body. Thus, an internal stylist will, on the average, have stronger *chi* than an external stylist will. It is through the internal styles that some of the teachings of Taoism are conveyed, more so than through the external styles. While there are external styles that claim Taoist descent, training in Taoist philosophy is usually

an outside addition to the martial training that the practitioner receives instead of actually being contained within the physical movements of the kung-fu style itself. It will be the three classical internal styles of kung-fu that I examine here, Hsing-I Chuan, Tai Chi Chuan, and Pa Kua Chuan.

Very little is known about the origins of Hsing-I Chuan. However, we do know that Taoists created the art in order to protect themselves, and others, from wild animals, including human bandits and their ilk, that they encountered in the wilderness. It is said that Hsing-I was developed during the Northern Sung dynasty (about CE 1127-1276). The most commonly accepted founder of this style of kung-fu is Yueh Fei, a general in the Sung dynasty. Some legends say that his Taoist teacher, Chou Ton, taught Yueh Fei Hsing-I. Yueh Fei is said to have taught Hsing-I to his entire army and because of this his army was never defeated. It is said that this gave rise to the saying, "It is easier to fight a mountain than to fight the army of General Yueh Fei".

Hsing-I Chuan can be translated as "form-mind boxing," "form-will," "body-mind," "mind boxing," or "heart-mind boxing". The goal of Hsing-I is to unify the mind and the body. Just like all of the other internal styles of kung-fu, Hsing-I Chuan places great emphasis on developing the chi of the practitioner. Through the development of the chi, the practitioner can develop devastating power in their fighting techniques without having to rely entirely on the muscles of the body to deliver this power. Various exercises are used in Hsing-I for developing the chi of the practitioner.

Hsing-I is based upon the Taoist theory of *wu hsing*, or the five elements. It is important to note that the five elements are not actually the things from which they get their names, they are more like concepts than they are actual physical things. The elements should be thought of as being the *nature*, or *essence* of those things that they are named after. Also, things that have within them the nature of an element, like molten metal has in it the nature of water because it moves and flows like water does, are referred to as that element. In the previous example of the molten

metal, the Metal, when melted, would "become" Water. Two different cycles of the five elements are utilized in the practice of Hsing-I. In the first cycle, the creative cycle, the elements are arranged in a pattern of mutual creation. This cycle starts with Metal (P), then Water (Tswan), then Wood (Peng), then Fire (Pao), and finally, Earth (Heng). This cycle of creation is explained in the following way. Metal creates Water (metal, when melted down, becomes liquid and flowing like water), Water creates Wood (water and nutrients from the Earth's soil are combined in order for a tree to grow), Wood creates Fire (the trees in the forest will catch on fire), Fire creates Earth (the trees will be reduced to ash which will return to the soil), and Earth creates Metal (the minerals in the soil combine with each other in order to form various kinds of metals). In the Taoist theory of the five elements, there are Metal, Water, Wood, Fire, and Earth. In Hsing-I there are forms, prearranged sets of movements with martial and chi cultivating applications, that have been created to express each of the five elements. A student of Hsing-I learns the five element forms in the creative cycle (Metal, Water, Wood, Fire, and Earth) in order to help them learn the forms. If a student has a strong foundation in the Metal form, then they will learn the Water form much more quickly and accurately than if they learned Water form first and then tried to learn the Metal form. This practice follows the Taoist theory of the five elements because Metal creates Water. It also follows the doctrine of *wu wei* because it would be much more difficult for the student to learn the elements out of the creative arrangement. If the student did learn the element forms out of the creative order, he or she would have to expend more energy than is necessary to achieve his or her goal (learning the five element forms).

Aside from the five element forms themselves [P'Chuan (Metal fist), Tswan Chuan (Water fist), Peng Chuan (Wood fist), Pao Chuan (Fire fist), and Heng Chuan (Earth fist)] there are also the Wu Hsing-I Chuan (five elements continuous chain) and Wu Hsing-I Er Ren (five elements, two-man fighting) forms. The Wu Hsing-I Chuan form is a combination of the movements of the five element forms arranged in the creative cycle while the Wu Hsing-

I Er Ren form is a mock battle between two practitioners where the destructive cycle is employed. In the Wu Hsing-I Er Ren form, one practitioner will attack the other using the Metal fist. The second practitioner will counter Metal with Fire (Fire defeats Metal), the first will counter this with Water (Water defeats Fire) the second will counter this with Earth (Earth defeats Water) the first will counter this with Wood (Wood defeats Earth). Some of the schools of Hsing-I consist only of these element forms while others also incorporate the twelve animal forms into their style of Hsing-I. These elements are arranged either in the creative cycle (Metal begets Water, Water begets Wood, Wood begets Fire, Fire begets Earth, And Earth begets Metal) or in the destructive cycle (Fire defeats Metal just as the blacksmith's forge melts the iron that he works with, Water defeats Fire just as the water from the fireman's hose extinguishes the fire that is consuming a building, Earth defeats Water just as a dam holds an entire river at bay, Wood defeats Earth just as small trees will grow in the most stubborn soil, and Metal defeats Wood just as the lumberjack's ax fells the mightiest oak in the forest) according to what the practitioner is trying to accomplish. If he/she is trying to achieve good health through the practice of the five element forms then he/she will practice the forms in the creative sequence in order to cultivate their own chi. If the Hsing-I student is practicing in order to learn how to defeat an opponent then they will practice the five element forms in the destructive cycle.

Taoist theories and doctrines can also be found in the movements of Tai-chi, another one of the internal styles of kung-fu. Tai-chi was developed by people living in Taoist monasteries, most probably because they came to have poor health due to the neglect of their physical bodies. The Taoists believed that almost all conflicts come from a sense of self. That is, they believed that a person's concept of self (the Ego) would bring about hardship for the person. In this sense, Taoism is rather like Archaic Buddhism. Because of this belief, they extensively practiced non-physical meditation and various rituals in order to cleanse the mind of the concept of self. This neglect of their bodies led to the decline of their overall health. The Taoists saw this

problem and started to spend more time on the development of wai-kung, meditation which incorporates bodily movements, exercises. These exercises served as a base upon which the Taoists eventually developed Tai-chi. There are many different styles of Tai-chi today. Some of the styles are very old while others are relatively new. While texts such as the Tao Te Ching serve as a verbal communication of Taoism, Tai-chi serves as a non-verbal communication of Taoism. Each move in the Tai-chi form reflects or demonstrates a concept that is put forth in a passage from the Tao Te Ching. In this way Tai-chi literally is living, breathing, moving Taoism. While the other internal arts also express different Taoist theories, Tai-chi specifically expresses ideas found in the Tao Te Ching.

Tai-chi is based upon the Taoist theory of opposites. This theory makes use of a symbol called the T'ai-chi. The symbol is that of a circle containing two shapes, which have been likened to fish, one black (Yin) and the other white (Yang). Within the "body" of each shape is contained a small circle which is the opposite color of the shape that it is contained in. These shapes symbolize the "forces" of Yin and Yang. Yin is thought of as being the dark, receptive, feminine, soft and passive. Yang is thought of as being masculine, active, light, creative, and hard. All things in existence are a mixture of Yin and Yang.

Tai-chi Chuan embodies the theory of Yin and Yang. The movements of Tai-chi are circular (Yin) and linear (Yang), soft (Yin) and powerful (Yang). Also, when a limb is bent it is in a Yin state (because it is not straight), and when a limb is straight it is in a Yang state (because it is straight). This theory of opposites is also to be found in the actual fighting techniques of this style. Moves such as throws usually use the opponent's pre-existing momentum in order to hurl him a great distance. This receptiveness is most certainly Yin in nature.

A student of Tai-chi Chuan is taught to counter hard with soft and vice versa because the only thing that will "defeat" Yin is Yang and the only thing that will "defeat" Yang is Yin. Thus, if an opponent rushes toward you with a baseball bat you will counter that with soft, circular movements (Yin counters Yang) and if an

opponent maintains a distance then the student will close the gap and actively attack the opponent (Yang counters Yin).

Another of the internal styles is Pa-Kua Chuan, or Ba-Gua Chuan. Literally translated, it means "eight trigrams fist".

Pa-kua is composed of various circling and linear postures named after and based on the movements of the snake, stork, dragon, hawk, lion, monkey, and bear, and has many of its roots in the Book of Changes. (Farkas and Corcoran in The Overlook Martial Arts Dictionary p.209)

This martial art style is based upon the I-Ching (The Book of Changes). The I-Ching is an oracle used by the Taoists and followers of many of the other religions and philosophies of China and other nations as well. The movements in Pa-Kua are circular in nature, like most of the movements of Hsing-I and Tai-Chi. Like the other internal styles, Ba-kua emphasizes the cultivation of chi in the practitioner and uses this chi in order to cultivate good health and for self-defense.

The Taoists have also attempted to pass on their teachings through the written language and most especially through poetry. Many of the great sages of Taoism are also considered great poets. While the Taoists made claims that "The Way that can be spoken of is not the Eternal Way", they wrote many lengthy tomes on the very subject that they claimed was ineffable. This may, at first glance, appear to be a waste of time entirely. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the Taoists were not trying to convey the ultimate reality through anything that they wrote. They only attempted to point at that which they could not describe, to give us a "road map" of sorts that we might use in order to arrive at or achieve the Tao. It is almost as if they are saying to us, "Look! Look there on the horizon! Do you see that?"

Many of the books in the Taoist canon are written in poetic verse. In this way, Taoism has, at the root of its written doctrines, a certain sense of harmony and flow. This comes as no surprise when one sees that the basic ideas of the philosophy itself are of flowing action and living in harmony with the laws and

patterns of nature. Below are some examples of such poetry. Unfortunately, I do not have the knowledge to present them in their original Chinese so these poems will have lost much of their poetic style and beauty in the translation.

T'ao Ch'ien
"Drinking Alone in Continuous
Rain"
Destiny and life both have an
ending;
From of old it has been so.
In this world there was a stately
pine,
And where is it now?
An old friend gave me wine;
He said it would make me feel
spritely.
I tried to drink it, and all my
emotions soared.
I drank again to my heart's content,
Forgetting suddenly that there is a
heaven.
Is heaven not also here?
Relying on my inner self, I stand
before the universe.
Only the cloud crane has strange
wings,
Returning in a wink of time.
I, alone, embracing this self,
Have muddled through for more
than forty years.
The body has undergone much
change,
But the heart lives on. What more
can I say?

If we look closely enough at "Drinking Alone in

Continuous Rain" we can see the idea that the human body is, in a sense, a replica of the entire universe. On the eleventh line of this poem T'ao Ch'ien writes, "Is Heaven not also here." This idea of the microcosm (the human body) and the macrocosm (Heaven, or universe) and how the two are very similar, if not identical, is an idea that can be found in many places throughout Taoist writings and teachings. We can see another Taoist theme in a poem that was written by Wang Wei.

"On Parting With Spring"

Day after day we can't help growing older.
Year after year spring can't help seeming younger.
Come let's enjoy our winecup today,
Not pity the flowers fallen!

In "On Parting With Spring" we can see the Taoist idea of wu-wei. Wu-wei can be understood in many different ways. It can be thought of as taking the least amount of action necessary to complete a task or accomplish a goal. Also, it can be thought of as being a way of life in which one follows and adheres to the laws and cycles in nature and does not attempt to control them because that would only lead to hardship. It is this last definition of wu-wei that is most applicable to this poem. In this poem can be seen this very concept. Wang Wei seems to be saying that we cannot worry too much about aging as it is a natural thing and a part of the cycles of nature. He uses the spring to symbolize youth and that of the fallen flowers to symbolize old age. He says in the poem "Come let's enjoy our winecup today, Not pity the flowers fallen!" By saying this he is saying that we should not lament over times and events that have passed already, and that we should live in the moment and enjoy it while it is still here in the present.

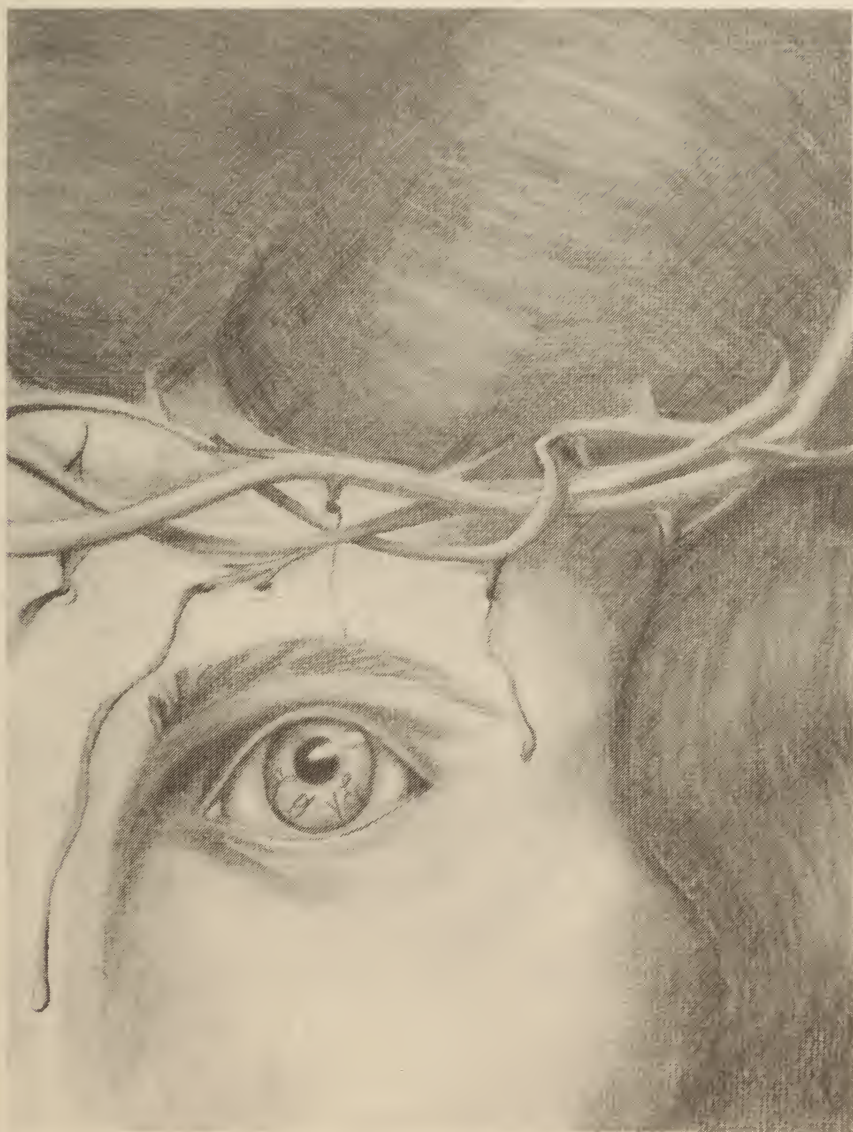
Although the Taoists themselves claim that their philosophy can not be spoken of, it is clear that the very people who taught this also passed on their traditions and philosophies through various modes of expression. Although they say and teach this, the Taoists have developed many different means for expressing the teachings of their philosophy. The ideas of Taoism can clearly be seen within these forms of expression, both verbal

and non-verbal. These methods of communication range from extensive treatises and poetry to greatly varied physical arts. Although some of these forms of expression are totally non-verbal, they still contain and express Taoist ideas.

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For God So Loved the World...
Elizabeth Patchen

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